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A THRILLING PUBLICATION
The FLOATING COFFINS
A Dan Fowler Mystery Novel
By G.T. FLEMING-ROBERTS
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September, 1944, issue

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# FEDERAL FLASHES

## A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

IT WAS close to dawn when nine G-Men under the leadership of Dan Fowler and Larry Kendal surrounded the house that was the hide-out of the most vicious gang in the annals of crimedom! They moved silently with guns ready, their actions hidden by the darkness.

"This may not be easy," Dan Fowler said. "We know the gang is here and I'm quite certain their leader is Frenchy Hamilton—but we don't know what he looks like. In comparison to him, the others are small fry."

The F. B. I. men took their posts and got ready, but before they could stage the raid a neighbor spotted the shadowy figures moving around and started yelling loudly for help. Fowler and his aides got into the house but a smoke bomb tossed by the crooks blinded and choked the Federal men.

Dan Fowler found himself struggling with a man he was sure must be Frenchy Hamilton. The fight was wild and furious while it lasted but the leader of the crooks got away without his face actually being seen. All Fowler had discovered was that Frenchy was wearing the uniform of a prisoner from the U. S. Army Rehabilitation Center.

### Prison Camp Trail

The trail led to the camp where the army prisoners were kept. Here Fowler and Kendal seek the elusive Frenchy, who was obviously someone at the Rehabilitation Center —and murder strikes!

It is this tense situation that makes ONE THOUSAND SUSPECTS, by Norman A. Daniels, in the next issue of G-MEN DETECTIVE, a novel that is packed with action and suspense from start to finish!

Who was Frenchy Hamilton? Could he be parading in the guise of Jess Palmer, one of the prisoners? Or was he really George Chandler, the sociologist? He might be any of a thousand suspects—and it was up to Dan Fowler to find the right man. How he does so is told in ONE THOUSAND SUSPECTS, a grand mystery. It's a humdinger from start to finish—and it's only one of the grand yarns coming next issue!

DEATH BLACKS OUT, by Henry Kuttner, is a mystery that will keep you guessing. Cap Hagstrom, former skipper of the JANE MARLOW, had run the little town of Las Ondras on the California coast in his own way ever since his ship went down.

When Amos Hardesty was murdered during a blackout the captain went about solving the crime in his quiet way. He was nearly killed before he captured the guilty man, but he won through in DEATH BLACKS OUT, one of next issue's exciting thrillers!

In addition, other stories and features—making next month's issue a swell reading treat!

### Letters from Readers

WE OFFER our thanks to all of you readers who have written us about the magazine and the G-MEN CLUB. We have read and enjoyed all of your letters and would like to hear from more of you. Tell us which stories you have liked best, and about those you didn't like, for we value your opinions.

Everyone is invited to belong to the G-MEN CLUB. Just fill out the application in this department, enclosing a stamped and self-addressed envelope and we will send you your membership card. There are no dues or fees for this. The coupon will instruct you how to obtain the G-Men Emblem if desired.

Of course you know that joining the club or the possession of the G-Men Emblem does not grant you any special privileges with regard to local or national law-enforcement bodies, nor should it encourage you to go around tackling crime single-handed. That calls for long and special training, so leave it to the law.

Our club is a worth-while, friendly get-together place for patriotic and public spirited readers of the magazine who have a mutual interest in law enforcement.

Here's an interesting letter from one of our readers:

I have been reading G-MEN DETECTIVE for about four years now and I wouldn't miss any issue for the world. I like Dan Fowler and Larry Kendal—though I like Fowler best. I do have one kick though. Sally Vane doesn't seem to play as an important part in the stories as she once did—and I think she should have more to do. But then I would stick up for my own sex.—*Betty White, Chicago, Ill.*

Thanks for your letter, Betty. We'll see

*(Concluded on page 8)*

# Here's an amazing new 3-point way to learn music!

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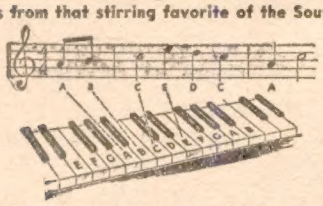


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9-44 ☐ If already a member, check here

## FEDERAL FLASHES

*(Concluded from page 6)*

what can be done about having Sally Vane play a more important part in future Dan Fowler novels.

Here's a reader with a different opinion:

I like the other stories in G-MEN DETECTIVE much better than I do the ones about Dan Fowler. The novels are exciting and I always read them—but the shorter stories about other people appeal to me more. Guess I just like variety in my fiction. All the same you have a swell magazine.—*Robert Martin, Boston, Mass.*

Everyone likes a change now and then, Bob—that's why we try to give you such a variety of stories in each issue—and thanks for your letter.

Guess that is about all for this time. Please address all letters and postcards to The Editor, G-MEN DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Thanks!

—THE EDITOR.

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Pockets are good places to hold keys . . . and loose change for carfare and newspapers.

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Bonds buy security for your old age.

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Bonds buy things you'll need later—that you can't buy now.

Bonds buy peace of mind—knowing that your money is in the fight.

Reach into the pocket I invented. Take out all that extra cash. Invest it in interest-bearing War Bonds.

You'll make me very happy if you do.

You'll be happy too.

## WAR BONDS to Have and to Hold

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As they hit the water, the collapsing rubber craft closed around McNary (CHAPTER I)

# THE FLOATING COFFINS

## By G. T. FLEMING-ROBERTS

*Treacherous Sabotage and Wild Rumors Bring the Ace of the F.B.I. into Action to Do Battle Against Vile Forces That Threaten the Lives of Americans on the Far-Flung Seven Seas!*

### CHAPTER I

### *Ocean Tragedy*

THE June Moon, as they had christened her, had been a gallant craft in the air but, carrier-based as she was, she wasn't much for swimming. Pilot Joe Davis had hoped to set her down on solid China soil after unloading bombs for Tokyo, but that just wasn't in the cards. Two hundred miles off Jap shores, the squadron had sighted a cruiser flying the Rising Sun. The June Moon had done her job.

Zukoff, bombardier, had put his third down the stack of the Jap at low altitude. Low, because the boys in the June Moon weren't taking any chances on the Jap limping off to fight again. What the June Moon had given in bombs she had taken in flak. She had been a sort of flying sieve when the job was done. Joe Davis had kept her aloft some minutes after the waves had closed over the cruiser however.

"What you working so hard for, Joey?" Al McNary, the co-pilot had asked wryly. "We ain't going anywhere."

And McNary had been right. The June Moon was a gallant craft in the air, but like the girl who won the bathing beauty contest at Atlantic City, she wasn't much on the swim.

It was Zukoff who had twisted the valve of the carbon dioxide inflator attached to the side of the rubber life raft, and he with

Davis, McNary, and Lehman climbed out of the rough and chilly water. A grin had spread across Joe Davis' deeply tanned face as he pointed to the white stenciled letters on the rolled sides of the rubber boat. They read:

INLAND RUBBER CO.,
Indianapolis

"Look, you guys. My old home town! Largest city not on navigable water."

"They got a fine lot of nerve building boats there then," Zukoff had commented.

"All right. So they made your Norden bombsight there, too, buddy."

DAN FOWLER

Zukoff, McNary and Lehman got a kick out of all that. They asked Joe Davis what was he anyway—floating delegate from the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce? Joe let them have their fun, and each time the rubber craft rode like a chip to the crest of a twenty-foot wave, Joe could see the white letters stenciled on the boat. To him those letters were something like the return address on a letter from home.

JOE DAVIS could close his eyes against the glare of the afternoon sun and see Miss Indiana atop the Soldiers and Sailors monument. He could see the Peace Plaza with its incredibly beautiful War Memorial, the obelisk and fountains. Especially, he could see winding old University Avenue and the square white house that was home, shaded by huge vase-shaped elms.

The stenciled letters put another idea in his head. He could remember a letter from Dad telling about the scrap rubber salvage program. It would be dog-gone funny if the raft that kept the crew of the June Moon afloat had once been one of those old tires hanging in the garage back home.

It was a pleasant thought, one that he felt might keep him alive and hoping, even when all logical reason for hope was gone. It might come to that.

Possibly that selfsame idea was in the minds of the others, though of course no body mentioned it.

They talked about the raid on Tokyo, speculating as to what might have happened to the others in their squadron. Zukoff crabbed about the bomb he had personally autographed for Tojo and had hoped to deliver. That, he swore, was the bomb he had put down the stack of the Jap cruiser. Then, as the hours of the afternoon wore on, the well of conversation went dry, and they simply drifted with the will of the wind, staring at the vast expanse of sea and sky.

Joe Davis thought that vast expanses could be maddening if you let them get you down.

It was Lehman who brought up the inev-

itable subject of food. Joe Davis had felt the inner gnawing for an hour or more, but had said nothing. For every hour they didn't eat was just that much longer that their rations would last. This vacation cruise of theirs could stretch out into days or even weeks. But hardly months.

Al McNary got out the ration kit from the stern and passed it to Lehman. Lehman passed it to Zukoff who didn't want the responsibility either, and in the end it was Joe Davis who had to make the frugal division.

It was when they were soberly consuming their allotted sip of water that Joe Davis looked eastward and sighted the ship.

It was nothing more than a flaunted plume of smoke against the horizon, but all agreed it was a ship. The only question was what sort of a ship was she?

"If she's a Jap," McNary said dryly, "I'll just stick to this luxury liner right here. We got food and plenty of nice clean air."

"If she's a Jap," Lehman said, "she'll ignore a distress signal. How's for sending up a tracer, Joe?"

"Sure," Zukoff put in. "This could be the last bus for town. And we all got heavy dates."

Joe Davis nodded his agreement. Al McNary shrugged, yielding to the majority. He was a strange man, this McNary. A fatalist. Always expecting the worst, yet always able to kid about it.

Zukoff was amidships, manning the stubby oars. He got the boat around to head for the feather of smoke that was their hope. And, as though to give them a helping hand, the wind changed and bellied their tiny sail.

"Look at that!" Lehman said. "We got a tail wind!"

His fingers shook a little as he got out the flare gun and its kit of cartridges.

A minute later, when their bobbing craft had slid to the crest of a wave, Lehman pointed the gun skyward and let it pop. They watched the tracer of smoke that spiraled above, wide-eyed, like boys watching a rocket.

"'A pillar of smoke by day,'" somebody quoted quietly, and then they watched in silence for the first indication that their signal had been noticed.

"She's turning one way or the other," Joe said finally, of the ship on the horizon. "She wouldn't be running from the likes of us. Could be we've got a break, boys."

Joe looked at the prow of the rubber boat and the white stenciled letters that were like a talisman to him. A grin broke on his face and as quickly faded, for it was then that he noticed the bubble.

That bubble on the rubber outer wall was an insidious thing. Even as Joe Davis' eyes fastened upon it, the blister grew, thinned, and almost immediately broke. Joe impulsively slapped a hand over the break in the wall of the life raft in a futile effort to lock in the escaping gas. The boat went crazy like a toy balloon from which the air is suddenly released.

Impelled by back pressure of the gas, it spun around and around, all the time folding beneath them.

THEY hit the water—Davis, Zukoff, and Lehman. Something happened to Al McNary. The collapsing craft closed up around him like a fly-catcher plant about an insect.

McNary and the rubber raft disappeared from view simultaneously, and by that time Joe Davis had been wave-tossed thirty feet from the spot.

"Swim!" Joe shouted. "Get onto your backs, you guys. Keep afloat. Help's coming!"

The wind tore part of the words from his mouth, flung others back into his throat. In his anxiety about the others, a huge wave engulfed him, and he came out of it strangled and blinded by the salt water. When he could see again, he was in a trough between waves, separated from his companions. He got onto his back, rode the next wave to the crest, but even then he could see none of the crew of the June Moon.

He was alone.

But dying, as he had frequently reflected, is the one thing you must do alone.

He lay quietly on his back, floating, swimming a little, riding out the waves. The thing to do was to conserve energy.

Conserve it for what? To live a little longer, to hope where there was no hope?

Yet for Joe Davis this was not the end. Even when the ruddy glow was gone from the sky and darkness brought its numbing chill, it was not the end.

## CHAPTER II

### *Corpse in the Sky*

CONTINENTAL Airliner, Flight Six, took on two passengers at Cincinnati. One was a man who talked too much and the other a woman who, as it turned out, said far too little. Inspector Dan Fowler of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, seated near the center of the plane, gave both the new passengers an appraising glance as they came off the wheeled ramp and through the oval door,

The woman preceded the man by about four minutes. She was middle-aged, rather heavy, bulging her gray spring suit in all the wrong places. Through a veil that was thicker than present fashion dictates, her brooding countenance had somewhat the aspect of an ill-tempered but well-fed ghost grown tired of haunting. Whatever ailed her, it did not appear to be any of Fowler's business, and the tall, athletic-looking G-man dismissed her from his mind as soon as she was settled across the aisle.

There was no ignoring the new male passenger however. The public address system trumpeted his name no less than six times before he put in his disappointing appearance.

He was a sharp-featured, mousey man with sandy complexion and blue eyes constantly on the alert for mole hills out of which to make mountains. He was worried about his baggage, in and out three times to find out what became of it. Then there was the matter of his name.

"You must have heard what they did to my name on that loud-speaker, Stewardess," he said crossly. "Calling me 'Mr. Sour.' The name is Sawer—Jacob Sawer—and I resent anyone trying to make something else out of it."

Dan Fowler winked at the stewardess who apologized for the airline profaning Mr. Jacob Sawer's good name as she got Mr. Sawer into a seat in front of Fowler and fastened his safety belt.

Mr. Sawer leaned across the aisle to tap the arm of the lady in gray. She turned lack-luster eyes upon him.

"Feeling better now, Mrs. Chapman?" Sawer asked.

She inclined her head slightly and murmured her thanks. Obviously she wished to be let alone.

"Nothing like it!" Sawer crowed. "I've used it myself for years, because in my business you have to keep on your toes. I'm with Inland Rubber of Indianapolis."

Dan Fowler regarded Jacob Sawer with renewed interest as he heard the name, "Inland Rubber." For that company name was tied up with the G-man's own mission to Indianapolis. And he was at once recalling his conversation with the F.B.I. Director the previous day.

"There's insidious trouble at the Inland Rubber plant, Dan," the Director had told him. "We've known of it for some time. What we don't know is just how many casualties on all our fighting fronts may have been traced to this ugly business—whatever it is. We first got wind of it from a bomber pilot, Joe Davis, who was hauled out of the North Pacific by a Russian ship. Davis said he and his fellow crew members had had to abandon their plane after having bombed a Jap cruiser. They took to the rubber life raft—an Inland product—and kept afloat about four and a half hours. Then, the life raft literally went to pieces beneath them. Only Davis survived."

Grave-eyed, Fowler had listened. He knew it was impossible to do more than hazard a guess at how many brave young lives had been snuffed out because of life rafts that turned out to be floating coffins. This much was known—that wherever Inland life rafts were in use, an increasing number of flyers reported as "missing" remained on the missing list when shot down over water.

"Of course," the Director had continued, "immediate steps were taken to avoid further loss. Planes equipped with Inland rafts have been grounded where no other equipment has been available. And since Inland produced the bulk of the rubber boats and certainly appeared to have a better product than competitors, this has meant a slowdown of our war effort at just when the initiative is in our hands."

"What's the cause of the trouble, sir?" Fowler had asked his superior.

THE Director had shaken his head.

"The War Department can't figure it out. Larry Kendal has been in Indianapolis several weeks now, on the inspection staff at the Inland Rubber Company, and we still don't know. Officials of the rubber company who have been told about the failure of the boats are nearly out of their minds. They know they've got to find the trouble, or lose their Government contract.

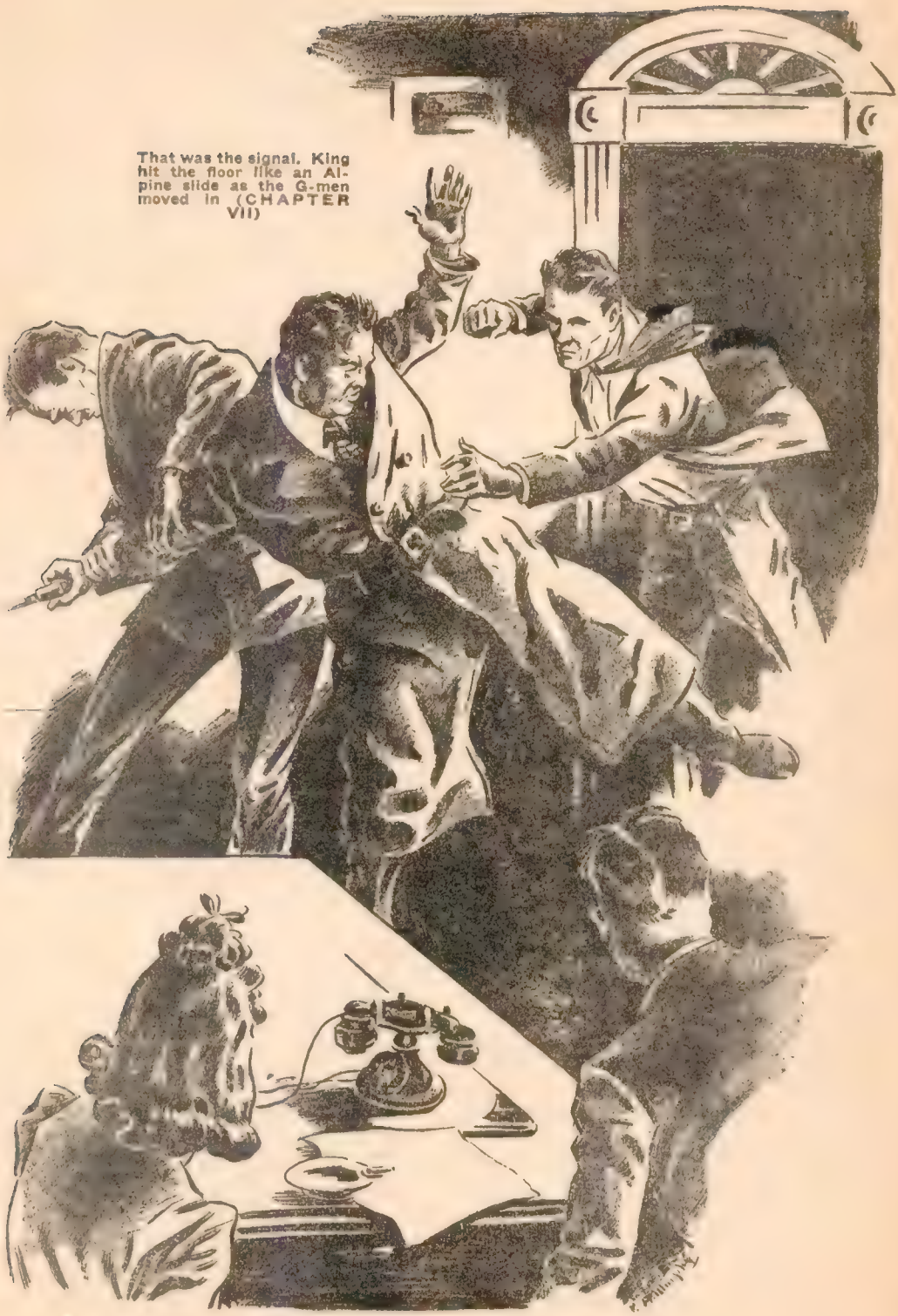
"At Kendal's suggestion, I've asked Sally Vane to take a position as secretary to Albert Ross, president and general manager of Inland Rubber. She may discover some lead through the internal politics of the company."

"And," Fowler asked hopefully, "you're sending me to Indianapolis to lend Sally and Kendal a hand?"

That would have pleased Dan Fowler, since Sally Vane was the girl in his life, and Larry Kendal his best friend. But he was recalling how the Director had lapsed into a thoughtful silence.

"Not exactly," the Director had said finally. "But if the matter on which I am sending you and the rubber plant business are connected—which is possible—so much the better. I'm counting on you, Fowler, to crack down on a ring of rumor mongers that seems to use that city as a hub. Kin of men in the Armed Forces have been receiving casualty reports from other sources than the Government. Many such reports have been false, and many have been true. It appears to be a deliberate effort to take the fighting heart out of the civilian population, to foster the opinion that our soldiers and sailors are suffering unnecessarily because of inadequate equipment."

Dan Fowler had immediately recognized that a campaign of sabotage on Inland rubber boats, combined with a Fifth Column whispering campaign would be the equivalent of much needed reinforcements to the



That was the signal. King hit the floor like an Alpine slide as the G-men moved in (CHAPTER VII)

Axis armies. But he had not understood how Axis agents had obtained the casualty lists.

"That goes back to an incident in the War Department office some time ago," the Director had explained. "A trusted clerk had been copying from the casualty list and also from the 'next of kin' list. When caught in the act he was properly dealt with for treason. What became of the lists he had copied we do not know. Because the man wouldn't talk."

"Shielding someone," Fowler had suggested.

"Shielding a woman," the Director had returned tartly. "And they say that clerk was the last man in the world who would be expected to be cat's paw for an unscrupulous woman. But we must admit that some women have no trouble reducing men to a plastic state."

"A Mata Hari?" Fowler had asked, smiling.

"In all seriousness—yes. There is such a woman in the United States today. Her name wouldn't mean anything, for she probably changes it constantly. I might give you a passport photograph of her, though it's apt to be more of a hindrance than a help.

"She came to this country just five years after the first World War, Fowler, which may give you some idea of how far ahead plans for World War II were laid. She became an American citizen, was far too clever to identify herself with any of the pan-German movements, or the German-American Bund. But we have every reason to suspect she is responsible for the treachery of the War Department clerk. If so, she may behind this sabotage and the whispering campaign in Indianapolis."

"I believe I understand, sir," Dan Fowler had replied.

"And one thing more," the Director had added in a tone of grave warning. "That War Department clerk took poison rather than disclose information which might have led to the apprehension and arrest of this woman."

"I see. She's sort of a cobra. Fascinating, but deadly."

She would be, Fowler thought whimsically, the exact opposite of the stout woman in gray across the aisle from him—Mrs. Chapman.

Through half-closed eyes, the G-man stared at her. She had crossed her knees, had slumped a little, her head back on the cushions and leaning slightly toward the window. He looked at her thick ankle in nylon hose and at the Cuban-heeled oxford she wore.

A FROWN on his forehead, Fowler stared intently at the foot. It was motionless, which it shouldn't have been. The pulse in the artery of the woman's leg should cause her foot to move slightly with every beat of her heart. And it was evident to anyone that it was not.

Dan Fowler turned in his seat, caught the eye of the stewardess at the rear, and beckoned to her. She came forward.

"Yes, Mr. Fowler?"

He crooked his finger. "Just a little lower," he said quietly. "Do you like secrets?"

The girl's lips curved in a smile. She bent over the tall G-man, a light brown curl brushing his lean, bronzed cheek.

"I think secrets are nice," she said.

"This one isn't," he whispered. "How many minutes to Indianapolis?"

She consulted her strap-watch. "Eight. Maybe a little longer. It'll be an instrument landing, I understand. There's soup. The Hoosiers call it smog."

"I know," Fowler cut in. "Take a not too obvious gander at the lady named Mrs. Chapman over there."

The stewardess glanced toward the lady in gray, then looked back at Fowler.

"She seems to be asleep."

"That's what I thought," the G-man said, "at first. Maybe you'd better look again."

The stewardess went forward, paused to exchange a word with a passenger, gave the time to another in the next seat. Then she crossed to Mrs. Chapman, bent low over the woman.

"Eight minutes, Mrs. Chapman," she said. "I'll fasten your safety belt for you if you like. There!"

The stewardess' deft fingers moved from the clasp of the belt, touched the wrist of the woman in gray.

The stewardess straightened, the smile on her lips fading as, somewhat enigmatically, she met Dan Fowler's gaze.

She nodded slightly, moved back toward the G-man.

"You'd better fasten my belt, too," he said. "I get a little nervous about instrument landings."

At least that had furnished an excuse for the girl to bend over him.

"Oh, an instrument landing is quite safe, Mr. Fowler," she said aloud, then in a whisper: "I'm afraid you're right."

"The lady is dead?"

"Yes, and we'll have to keep it quiet for now."

"Of course."

Fowler gave the girl a reassuring smile. They all had what it takes, these ladies of the skyways. Nothing more than a slight pallor betrayed the fact that everything was not at usual.

"I'll radio ahead for an ambulance," she whispered.

"And the police," Fowler told her. "It could be—murder."

The stewardess took a quick breath and straightened away from Dan Fowler. Another glance at the lady in gray, then she moved quickly up the aisle.

## CHAPTER III

### *Match Trick*

INDIANAPOLIS lay beneath a pall of mist turned to sand-blast silver by the lights below. The airliner sliced down through the murk and settled unerringly to the earth with neither a bump nor jar, taxied along the concrete runway toward the station, then braked to a standstill.

The stewardess opened the door as the passengers began to leave their seats, and leaned out to speak with someone in a low voice. Little Jacob Sawer was on his feet.

"Mrs. Chapman," he said. "Oh, Mrs. Chapman, you're not asleep, are you?"

Dan Fowler caught Sawer's thin arm. The man looked around, gave the G-man a how-dare-you look.

"Mrs. Chapman has been taken ill," Fowler said quietly. "You must not disturb her."

Jacob Sawer blinked. Fowler had maneuvered himself between the mousey little man and the motionless woman's figure.

"Ill?" Sawer sputtered. "Why, she was all right when she came aboard. I'll have a look at her."

Fowler shoved Jacob Sawer toward the door.

"They want the plane cleared," he said shortly. "Just how well do you know Mrs. Chapman?"

"I don't know her at all!" Sawer exploded. "We got into conversation at the Cincinnati airport and discovered we had certain interests in common. She happens to be chairman of the Cincinnati branch of the League for Post-war Accord, and I am a member of the Indianapolis branch. I don't see what business it is of yours, anyway!"

"None whatever," Fowler agreed mildly.

He had succeeded in moving Sawer toward the door, then Sawer was out on the wheeled ramp in the chill spring drizzle.

A red City Hospital ambulance stood near the airliner, and a couple of police in black slickers were at the bottom of the ramp. As the passengers alighted, the police took names, addresses, and asked the length of time the various persons intended to stay in the city.

Jacob Sawer was pretty well put out, but he gave the desired information and a little more. He lived in the city, had been born there, hoped to die there. He had been on a personal business trip to Cincinnati. He was employed by Inland Rubber, and implied that any interference with his activities on the part of the police would be sabotage against the war production program.

Mr. Sawer stalked down the ramp with all

"I have a key that fits," a whispering voice said (CHAPTER VIII)

the fuss of a wet hen rumpling her feathers.

Dan Fowler showed the police his credentials, and when all the passengers were out of the plane he re-entered it with the police and interns. While the interns were giving the dead woman a cursory examination, the G-man examined the contents of Mrs. Chapman's purse.

Her full name had been Grace Evans Chapman. She had carried nearly a hundred dollars in cash and two hundred more in traveler's checks. In case of accident, a sister in Portland, Oregon, was to be notified. There was nothing to which Fowler could attach any possible importance except a letter on the stationary of the Inland Rubber Company and signed by Albert Ross, president and manager.

The letter was a cordial invitation to Mrs. Chapman to attend a special meeting of the League for Post-war Accord, "at which matters of the utmost importance in planning for a bright new world will be discussed."

Dan Fowler turned all this over to the police, as the interns completed their examinations.

"Looks like just one of those things," one of them said. "A woman of fifty-five or sixty, fleshy, probably having hyper-tension or chronic miocarditis without knowing it."

"No suggestion of poison?"

The other man in white shrugged.

"Did she take anything while on the plane?"

"Not to my knowledge," the stewardess said.

"She took something before she got on the plane," Fowler told them. "I heard Jacob Sawer ask her if she was feeling better and when she replied affirmatively, Sawer said, 'Nothing like it. I've used it for years.' Which might suggest that Sawer had given her some medicine or suggested a remedy."

The policemen exchanged glances. One said he would talk to Sawer, and the interns promised to make a thorough check of the body at the morgue.

DAN FOWLER left the plane, went at once to the airport waiting room, and claimed his Gladstone bag. The place was crowded with civilians and men in uniform, and the air buzzed with low-voiced conversation. As Fowler was moving toward the phone booths he caught a scrap of conversation.

"If Pat didn't come on this plane, he won't be here tonight," he heard a girl's voice say. "They're grounding the other flights because of the fog."

It was a musical voice that spoke, one a trifle petulant because of disappointment. The G-man involuntarily looked for the owner of the voice.

She was a small girl with black hair smoothly coiffured and confined in a snood. Her delicately tanned face was oval, her chin firm and well-formed, her lips red and inviting, and her blue eyes were dark-fringed.

She was expensively dressed to achieve just the right casual effect. One beige-gloved hand was resting lightly on the arm of a tall, swart man in chauffeur's uniform. She stood on tiptoe, her beautiful eyes searching the crowd, presumably for "Pat."

Dan Fowler stepped into the phone booth and dialed a number Sally Vane had wired him before he left Washington. Waiting for the phone to be answered, his gaze returned to the girl who was waiting for Pat. Her right shoulder was toward the phone booth, and the G-man could see one smooth cheek. There was a king-size cigarette in her lips, and she seemed to be looking for matches in her purse. A yard away from her stood a distinguished looking man whose broad shoulders made him look younger than his gray temples did.

His call unanswered, Fowler decided that Sally must be working late in Ross' office. He looked up the Inland Rubber Company and dialed it. As he waited he saw the dark-haired girl outside the phone booth tap the arm of the man with the gray temples. He smiled, nodded, and took out a book of paper matches from a pocket. But from his vantage point, Dan Fowler saw something no one else in the room could have seen. When the girl accepted the matches from the gray-templed man, the palm of her right hand was concealing a second book of matches.

"Inland Rubber," Sally Vane's voice spoke from the receiver at Fowler's ear. "Mr. Ross' office. Mr. Ross' secretary speaking."

Fowler grinned. "Tell Mr. Ross to tell Mr. Ross' secretary that I'm in love with her."

"Dan! When did you get in? Where are you?"

"At the airport. I just came down—with a corpse and a lovely stewardess. I'll be out in a taxi, honey, if I don't get sidetracked by something more intriguing."

"I like that!" Sally said. "What's she got that I haven't? I mean whomever you're referring to as 'more intriguing.'"

He laughed. "It isn't so much the girl as the trick she's doing with matches right now. I'm watching her from the phone booth, and I don't think she's aware of me at all."

"What sort of a trick?"

The girl outside the booth had lighted a cigarette. That done, her fingers deftly switched the two match-books before she handed one of them back to the gray-templed man. The man smiled, tipped his hat, and turned away.

"Dan," Sally said, "are you still there?"

"Uh-huh. Being intrigued."

"Well, you'd better stop it and come out and get me."

"Is it important, or just something to get me away from the lady who does match tricks?" Fowler asked, laughing.

"You'll just have to guess the answer!" Sally said and hung up.

As Fowler left the phone booth, the girl who performed match tricks was walking toward the doors leading to the parking lot, her eyes anxiously searching the throng. For a moment they lingered on Dan Fowler's lean, bronzed face. It was an entirely impersonal glance.

"I guess Pat couldn't make it, darn it!" she said to her chauffeur.

Then, at the door, she ran squarely into a porter who had just entered with both arms loaded with luggage. The girl dropped her purse—and the match-book she had palmed.

FOWLER moved quickly to step into the confusion created by the girl, an angry chauffeur, and an apologetic porter.

"Clumsy fool!" the chauffeur was roaring at the porter. "Why don't you look where you're going?"

"Please, Arnold," the girl said. "It was my fault. Stop acting like a police dog, can't you?"

A split second before she recovered her purse, Dan Fowler put his foot down on the match-book. He stooped before either the girl or the chauffeur could, and picked up the purse.

"Oh, thanks!" She gave him a nice smile and took back the purse. "And I believe I've dropped my matches."

She leaned over, looking on the floor. Fowler looked also, though careful not to shift his feet.

"Maybe that porter picked them up," the chauffeur suggested.

His muddy eyes sighted the redcap and he started after him belligerently.

"Arnold!" the girl called. "How absurd! Over paper matches!" And she followed as though intending to muzzle her vicious watchdog.

Fowler stooped quickly, picked up the match-book and hurried out to the parking lot. A taxi was just rolling in. Fowler sprinted for it, reached it just as a passenger was leaving it.

The G-man had his hand on the door when something spanged on the steel top of the cab and whined off into the night.

"What was that?" came from the startled cabby.

Fowler's fingers explored the top of the cab. There was a slight crease in the metal.

"Somebody throwing rocks," he said coolly, as he got into the taxi, though he knew that the missile that had glanced off the top of the cab was a bullet.

A nice place for a gun murder, he thought, listening to the racket made by the radial engines of two training planes that were being warmed up behind the steel fence. That would mask the sound of shots all right.

In the taxi, Dan Fowler examined the paper matches closely, but they were disappointing. The red cover advertised a widely sold brand of soft drink. None of the matches had been used, and they were ordinary enough, with dark brown heads. There was not so much as a pencil mark inside the paper cover. If everybody who picked up matches of this sort automatically became a target for a killer's gun, the undertaking profession was going to reap a harvest.

Was it possible that the girl at the airport had given the wrong matches to the gray-templed man?

And what of the mysterious death aboard the airliner? Mrs. Chapman had appeared to be a harmless soul. Had she been murdered? Had her activities as a member of the League for Post-war Accord something to do with her death?

The cab pulled up beside a group of low black buildings spread over half a city block on West Sixteenth Street. Fluorescent lighting cast its eerie glow from many windows beyond the twelve-foot barbed top steel fence.

"Here y'are, Mister," the driver said. "Inland Rubber."

As Fowler paid his fare and got out, the fog, or "smog," slapped him in the face like a wet dish mop. He made his way toward the nearest gate illuminated by a saffron-hued light bulb. There was a sign on the gate reading, "Employees Only," with a guard on duty. The G-man's credentials underwent close scrutiny before he was admitted, and headed toward the faintly illuminated sign that marked the office door.

Inside the door, a woman was mopping the floor within an oak-railed pen. Farther back a door was lettered:

A. H. ROSS, President

The woman paused in her labor at the appearance of the tall, pleasant-faced young man.

"Mr. Ross ain't here," she announced. "Went home over an hour ago. A man's got to eat some time, I guess, though when a woman's going to eat is another thing."

"'Woman's work is never done,'" Fowler quoted sympathetically. "I was looking for Mr. Ross' secretary."

"Miss Vane, you mean? She went over to Inspection a couple of shakes ago. You go out that door there and cut across the yard. She's likely there, talking to the boys."

Sally must have gone to see Larry Kendal, Fowler thought.

Perhaps one, or both of them had picked up something about the sabotage at the Inland plant.

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## CHAPTER IV

### *Blood in the Water*

DAN FOWLER crossed a yard enclosed on three sides by connecting buildings. There scrap rubber was piled, awaiting reclamation. It was reprocessed, passing through the various steps of molding and curing to come out a finished rubber boat at the end of the northwest wing. At the end of this wing Fowler saw a door lettered:

INSPECTION

On the top of three steps leading to the door a man stood, smoking a cigarette. Light from the globe above fell upon a bare head with thinning light hair, swept back from a high forehead. The man was above medium height, middle-aged, square-shouldered. His features were angular, his cheeks smooth, ruddy as from a recently massage.

"Hello," he said, as Fowler appeared. It was less of a greeting than an inquiry. Clear hazel eyes examined the tall G-man's bronzed face minutely.

"Hello," Fowler responded, pausing at the foot of the steps. "I'm looking for Miss Vane."

"Miss Vane?" the man frowned slightly. "Oh! Mr. Ross' new secretary. If she's around here she'll be over on the other side. In the office." He took the cigarette out fo his mouth and coughed dryly. "I'm John Burch. I don't believe I remember seeing you around here before."

"Probably not. The name is Fowler and this is the first time I've ever been inside the gates."

The hazel eyes showed alarm. "Would you mind explaining how you happen to be inside the gates now?"

"I explained my presence to the satisfaction of the guard," Fowler said coolly. "I'll explain it to any of the proper authorities."

"I'm on the board of directors, a small stockholder, and president of the Small Stockholders Association," Burch said dryly. "You understand my concern at finding a stranger prowling around here after dark?"

Dan Fowler nodded, pulled out his wallet, and showed his identification.

"F.B.I." Burch whistled. "Well, Mr. Fowler, the place is yours. In fact, I'm mighty glad to have you around. I have an appointment with Mr. Ross right now, but perhaps I'll see you later."

Fowler entered and found himself in a wide, dimly lighted, deserted hallway. Light showed through the frosted glass of the door of a cubicle on the right, illuminating black lettering:

INSPECTION—H. MASON

Dan Fowler heard the familiar voice of Sally Vane from beyond the door.

"Switchboard, connect me with the chief guard. Hurry!"

The G-man walked into the small room which contained a desk, telephone, and several steel lockers and filing cabinets. Sally, standing at the desk had her back toward the door. At the sound of footsteps, she dropped the telephone into its cradle, twisted around, her blue eyes startled. As she saw Fowler her expression changed to instant relief. Her hand dropped limply on the desk, knocked something off that fell to the floor with a metallic clatter.

"Dan!" she cried. "I was never so glad to see anybody in my life!"

But Dan Fowler had seen it then—the knife that lay on the floor between them, it's curved blade freshly dyed with blood. There was a single drop on the front of Sally's white blouse.

"A—a rubber knife," she said lamely as though that explained everything.

"What's it used for around here besides the gentle art of butchering?" demanded Fowler.

"To trim the paper mold lining off the boats. It's incredibly sharp. It was on the top of Larry Kendal's locker. I came in here looking for Larry, couldn't find him. I went to his locker to see if his coat was still here and blood—dropped on me."

Sally was trembling. She spread her hands in a helpless gesture.

"You took the knife down?" asked Fowler.

She nodded. "Dumb. But I didn't know what it was until I had hold of it. I laid it on Mr. Mason's desk, and had started to call the chief guard."

SALLY'S lovely face had lost most of its color and a stray lock of her gold hair had fallen across her forehead. Dan Fowler moved forward suddenly, took her in his arms and kissed her. When he released her he jerked a thumb at the knife on the floor.

"Just a knife?"

"Yes. But where's Larry, Dan? Where's anybody?"

"They've stopped production?" Fowler asked.

"Not entirely. They've cut out the night shift in the molding end, though the reclamation division is going full blast. Larry has them keeping the day shift going, always hoping to find where along the production line the deviltry begins."

Fowler nodded. "Stay here, and I'll have a look around. Don't bother phoning the chief guard just now."

"Oh, everything's under control now," she said with a smile. "Dan Fowler's here."

He went out into the hall which had been dimly illuminated by wire-guarded bulbs in the ceiling. It was not illuminated now. Except for what light came from the cubicle

where Sally was, the hall was as dark as the bottom of a well. Fowler didn't like any of it—the knife nor the blood nor the darkness.

He opened the door of the opposite cubicle cautiously, beamed his flash light into the interior. It showed him a tensile strength testing machine, a small piece of rubber-coated fabric stretched between its upper and lower jaws. There was no possible hiding place for a man, living or dead.

He stepped back into the hall, his light beam searching in front of him. At the end of the cubicle in which he had seen the testing machine a tank twelve feet wide, twenty feet in length was set in the floor and filled to the depth of four feet with water.

Moored beneath the surface of the water was one of the Inland rubber boats, fully inflated. A heavy rubber tube leading from an air compressor in the corner extended to the edge of the test tank. A narrow bridge of timber, stretched across the tank, was provided with rollers so that it could be moved up and down the tank.

Fowler turned the beam of his light into the water, and saw that it was faintly tinged with pink. Blood? Or some chemical used in testing the boat?

He climbed onto the timber bridge, took careful steps toward the submerged life raft. Half-way along, he paused, light beam pointing straight down. On the timbers at his feet were drops of blood. It occurred to him then that a human body could readily be concealed by shoving it beneath the rubber boat.

Dan Fowler peeled off raincoat and suit coat, flung them back across the rail that surrounded the tank. He rolled up shirt sleeves, knelt on the bridge. Flashlight in one hand, he reached down under the rubber craft with the other, and grasped something.

And then something happened that might not have occurred if Dan Fowler hadn't tossed his raincoat over the guard rail. Because if the raincoat hadn't been there he might have seen the crouching figure that crept up, to hide behind the coat.

A long pole—a window stick nudged Fowler from behind. It wasn't much of a push. It didn't have to be, for the G-man was already stretching as far over the water as was possible and still maintain his balance. He struck the water flatly. The pole rammed a second time, glancing along the side of his head, stunning him momentarily. But he bobbed to the surface, blinded and choking. A third time the pole gouged him, this time between the shoulder blades, to force him down beneath the water and keep him there.

During the next few seconds, Dan Fowler knew what it was like to drown. No parade of his past life passed hauntingly through his mind. Instead, he couldn't think of anything but the absurdity of a man six feet tall drowning in four feet of water.

He stopped struggling, forced himself to relax at the bottom of the tank. Was the pressure from above relaxing slightly or were his senses gradually becoming dulled?

The pulse at his temples was drumming out a death march. He suddenly elevated his hips, keeping head and shoulders down. The pole skidded toward his neck. Instantly his fingers hooked onto the pole and yanked. He floundered over on his back, saw a man dimly outlined near the railing.

THE pole struck again like a harpoon, but Fowler was ready for it. He caught it in both hands and pulled, desperately trying to bring his would-be killer down. But the man at the rail let go of the pole, wheeled, and fled toward the huge folding doors of the testing room.

On his feet, the G-man seized the rail and hauled himself out of the tank. Instantly he unlimbered his heavy under-arm gun. The opening and closing of a smaller door cut in one of the big folding panels offered a camera-shutter flash of light and Fowler's gun blazed.

He couldn't have expected much accuracy, eyes smarting as they were. He climbed over the rail, gun in hand, and rushed the folding doors. But when he struck that small door in the center of one of the panels, it was locked. Again his gun blasted, the slug ripping through the lock. He broke through into a shipping room, with packing

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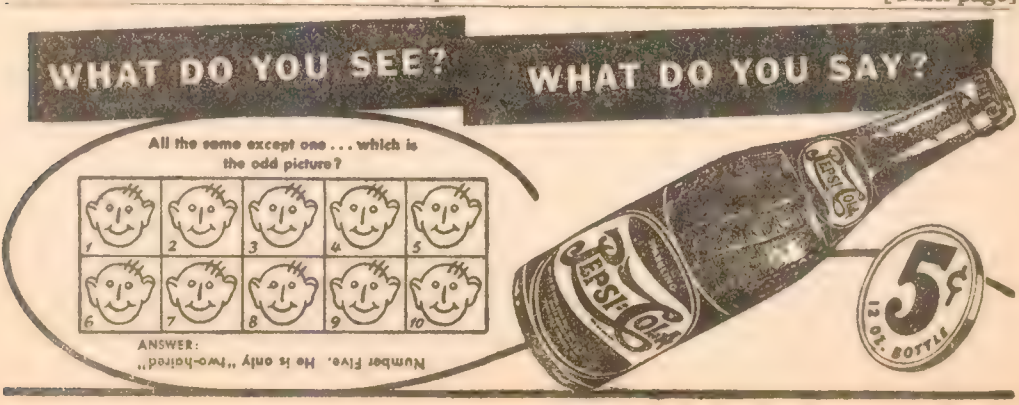

boxes in neat stacks all around.

He looked in every corner of the room, then moved on to a section of the building where inflators were installed on the boats. Here were more piles of cartons, containing the cylindrical carbon dioxide tanks which were attached to the finished boat.

But if the shipping and assembly rooms were large, the next department was cavernous in the dim night lights that glowed in its ceiling. The center portion of the room was clear, but along the walls partitions formed stalls. In them were the rubber boat molds, looking like coffins for giants in the dingy light. Hiding in such a place would be a cinch; hunting an arduous chore.

The sound of a door opening sent Fowler racing down the broad center aisle, only to run into two men coming in from the yard. Flashlights blazed into Fowler's eyes and he saw the glint of gun metal.

"Hold your fire, Withers!" Larry Kendal's familiar voice shouted. "That looks like Dan Fowler!"

The man Withers wore the uniform of a guard. Kendal, in a cream-colored smock with "Inland" across the front in red letters, looked a little bit like a tent that has weathered a wind storm, though he was long and lean, almost as tall as Dan Fowler beneath that smock. He swept forward, gun in one hand, what was left of a hamburger sandwich in the other. He holstered his gun, stuck out a hand which Fowler grasped briefly.

"We can skip that for a bit, Larry. There's a killer loose around here somewhere." Fowler swung to the guard. "Get some more men in here. This place is like a labyrinth. See if somebody's hiding out in these stalls!"

"Bays," Kendal said. "Not stalls, Dan'l. What's your killer look like?"

"All I can tell you is that he's a man. Or a woman worker in slacks."

Kendal looked his tall partner up and down, blinked incredulously.

"You been swimming, Dan'l?"

"Yes. In the test tank."

Two men came in through the door opening into the yard, and out in the misty night the guard's whistle shrilled keenly. Kendal turned to the new arrivals. One of the men Fowler recognized as the genial, pink-cheeked John Burch whom he had met outside. With him was a short, lightly built man, bald, with prominent ears and dry, yellowish skin.

"What's the shootin'?" the little man with the big ears demanded. "What's goin' on here Kendal?" Hard dark eyes shifted from Kendal's face to the lean bronzed countenance of Dan Fowler.

"Albert," John Burch said to the little man, "this is the other Federal agent I spoke to you about—Fowler. Mr. Fowler, this is Mr. Ross."

Albert Ross, the millionaire president of Inland Rubber, gave Fowler's fingers a quick, hard wring.

"Pleased," he said. "What's going on?"

Four guards led by Withers came in. High-powered lights were switched on, and Withers gave the order to scatter and search the bays.

"Mr. Ross," Fowler said grimly, "somebody's been murdered in the Inspection Department."

"Murdered!" cried Ross and Burch in unison.

Fowler nodded. "Who, I don't know. But the body was concealed beneath the boat in the test tank. If not discovered until tomorrow morning the time of death couldn't be fixed within a couple of hours. Your secretary, Mr. Ross, discovered the murder weapon and upset the killer's schedule. So unless he left the grounds within the past few minutes, the killer is still inside the factory fence."

"That's still takin' in a pretty sizable territory, Mr. Fowler," Ross said. "Must be close to five hundred persons working here right now."

## CHAPTER V

### *The Body*

FOWLER and Larry Kendal, confident that the guards would make a thorough search, led the way back toward the testing room.

"I'm here a week, Dan, and nothing happens with monotonous regularity," Kendal whispered. "You're here five minutes, and we've got a corpse!"

"Two," Fowler said grimly. "And except for a streak of luck, you could add me to the casualty list. I came out on the plane with a corpse—a lady named Chapman died on the airliner."

"Chapman, did you say, Mr. Fowler?" John Burch cut in. "Not a Mrs. Chapman from Cincinnati?"

"Not our Mrs. Chapman?" Albert Ross took a hop that brought him abreast of the two G-men.

"You mean she was employed here?" Fowler asked.

"Employed? No! She's the Cincinnati chairman of the League for Post-war Accord. I'm the president of the organization. Never met the woman, but she was doing great work. And you say she's dead?"

"Cause of death as yet unknown," Fowler said significantly. "One of your employees was aboard that plane, however. A man named Jacob Sawer. Know him?"

"Sawer is on the Inspection crew," said Kendal. "Talks too much, has headaches,

and imposes them on everybody else."

As they had reached the folding doors dividing the shipping room from the inspection room a man who came through the small broken door stopped in his tracks. Fowler's eyes narrowed. The man was the distinguished-looking, gray-templed individual who had passed a book of paper matches to the girl at the airport.

"Mr. Ross," the man said quietly, "something has happened to Miss Vane. She has been struck on the head."

Dan Fowler and Larry Kendal, followed by the others, sprinted into the test room, all their anxiety now for Sally. But Sally was alive, conscious, and sitting on the floor with her back against the desk. He hair was tumbled on one side and she was holding her hand over her head just back of the ear, wincing as she touched the bruise.

"Don't anybody ask me what happened, because I don't know!" she moaned. "Will somebody get me a glass of water?"

John Burch, near the water cooler, filled a paper cup. As he was turning from the cooler he ran into the gray-templed man. Water spilled down on the shoes and trouser cuffs of both. The gray-templed man snatched the cup and, refilling it, carried it to Sally.

"Sorry I was so clumsy, Mason," Burch said.

"An emergency is no time to get clumsy," the gray-templed man rapped. "Here, Miss Vane." He handed Sally the cup.

She drank a little of the water and some color returned to her cheeks.

"What were you doing in here anyway?" the gray-templed man asked Sally stiffly.

"Why," she explained, "I came here looking for you, Mr. Mason. Something I couldn't read in the last reports you sent over to Mr. Ross' office. And then—then that gentleman came in"—she indicated Fowler—"looking for Mr. Kendal. I'd found the knife—"

"What knife?" came in a chorus.

"The murder knife," Fowler said. "It was on top of Mr. Kendal's locker, the young lady said. She had picked it up and put it on the desk."

Already the G-man had noted that the rubber knife was no longer on the floor.

"But what happened to you, Miss Vane?" Ross asked.

"I don't know," Sally repeated. "The gentleman who was looking for Mr. Kendal thought, after he'd seen the bloody knife, that he'd better look around outside. After a while I heard footsteps and thought he was returning. I went to the door and looked out. Somebody hit me back of the ear, and that's all I remember until I came to and found Mr. Mason bending over me."

Hugh Mason nodded. "But where's the knife you were talking about?"

"I think," Dan Fowler said, "that a search for the knife can be postponed for a bit. We'd better have a look at the test tank."

Albert Ross' curiously hard black eyes shifted from Sally to Fowler. The bright hazel eyes of John Burch glanced at Hugh Mason's coldly handsome face. Burch's habitual dry cough broke a heavy silence.

"WELL, let's go," Larry Kendal said.

They crossed the hall to the test tank. The window stick which had held Dan Fowler in the water lay on the floor beside the guard rail. Burch, Mason, Kendal, and Fowler climbed over the rail. The two G-men went out onto the timber bridge, with Burch and Mason at opposite ends to move the bridge back and forth as needed.

"I think we can get at the front moorings from here," Kendal said. "Got a knife, Dan?"

Pocket knife opened, Fowler knelt and reached under the water.

"Anythink wrong with this boat, Mason?" called Ross.

The chief inspector shook his head. "Nothing wrong with any of them when they're in the tank. Nothing we have been able to discover."

"Have you thought of putting salt in the water in the exact concentration of sea water, Hugh?" John Burch asked.

Mason gave Burch a cold stare. "Mr. Burch, the water in this tank is the chemical equivalent of sea water in every respect."

When the moorings were slashed the front end of the boat bobbed up, striking the underside of the bridge. Instantly Albert Ross was ramming the window stick beneath the prow of the rubber craft, apparently trying to dislodge the body.

"Drop that, Mr. Ross," Fowler warned. "The police may be interested in checking fingerprints."

Ross dropped the stick as though it were hot.

Burch and Mason rolled the bridge back to the stern of the boat and the two Federal men again cut through ropes beneath the water. The rubber boat floated on the surface. And, floating face-down on the water, was, a small man's body.

"Stabbed!" Kendal said gravely as he reached for one of the dead man's arms. "Through the back."

Together they pulled the limp, sopping figure to the bridge.

"Looks like . . . No, it can't be!" Ross was all but hopping up and down in excitement. "It's not Jacob Sawer, is it?"

But Dan Fowler already had recognized that sharp-featured face, with the blue-white pallor of death now.

"I'm afraid it is, Mr. Ross," he said. "It's Jacob Sawer. Fatalities among the members of the League for Post-war Accord are running rather high tonight."

Larry Kendal called the police and remained near the body of Jacob Sawer during the Homicide Office investigation. Dan Fowler asked for the use of Hugh Mason's

office, and said that he wished to speak to Miss Vane alone.

"Dan," Sally asked, as she closed the door, "what was that about Ross' League for Post-war Accord? You don't think that's mixed up in this mess, do you?"

He nodded. "Wherever you find a large patriotic group with a high-sounding name these days, you're almost certain to find a few of the Axis crowd hiding. Before I left Washington, I had a look at some of the propaganda the league hands out—pamphlets supposedly written by Ross himself. There's an unfortunate parallel between the Leauge's ideals and those recently voiced by some of the pan-German movements. The 'Get-Hitler-and-Hitler-only' stuff, and if that's all this war is to accomplish we're in for another war in twenty years. Getting rid of the Kaiser in World War I didn't prevent World War II."

Fowler's bronzed face was set in sober lines.

"Pan-Germanism has been a thorn in the side of this country ever since the time of Lincoln. It has even been advocated that a German-speaking state be established within our own boundaries. The old master race idea. Hitler's a symbol that's becoming tarnished. Cast him aside and there'll be another bright new symbol to take his place unless we can pound the truth into the Germans that they're not superior!"

Fowler paused, and grinned at Sally.

"But I haven't answered your question, Sally. The unfortunate thing, about such organization as the League for Post-war Accord is that they are subtly advocating a negotiated peace. Punish Hitler, they say, but bring about an immediate peace. Maybe Ross doesn't know the implication is there. He could be the one hundred per cent American figurehead. But somewhere in his society, you'll find the hand of the Reich."

"Then," Sally said, "the figurehead seems to be slated for a going-away party, possibly attended by six men in black."

SHE reached into a pocket and handed Fowler an envelope. It bore a local post mark and had been delivered to Albert Ross, care of the Inland Rubber Company.

"I found it under Mr. Ross' blotter," Sally explained. "But I handled it with my eyebrow tweezers so I wouldn't add my fingerprints."

"Good girl," Fowler said. "I'll try and be as smart."

He used a pair of small forceps to extract and open the letter. The handwriting was bold, and masculine, but there was no signature.

> For everything you've cost me you will pay, even with your last drop of blood.

"Well, it's the last drop that counts, I've heard." Fowler slipped the letter into his pocket.

"You think anybody here knows of your connection with Larry and me?" he asked Sally.

"I doubt it," Sally snapped. "You've practically ignored me."

He laughed. "I'll make up for it some day, honey. Run along now, and send in Albert Ross, Hugh Mason, and John Burch."

John Burch and Albert Ross came into the little office, but Mason, they explained, was busy with the police.

"I'll see him later then," Fowler said. "Are you a member of the League for Post-war Accord, Mr. Burch?"

Burch coughed behind his hand, then admitted:

"Yes. It seems a worth while organization. Most of the officials of Inland Rubber belong, don't they, Albert?"

Ross bobbed his bald head. "And not to flatter me, Mr. Fowler. Doin' a great work, the League is. Growin' by the hour."

"I don't doubt that," Fowler said dryly. "Just where do you get prospective members?"

Ross' black eyes met those of the G-man squarely.

"They're gathered by the membership committee, of course. I'm too busy to spend time on trivial matters like that."

Dan nodded. "I see. Doubtless among your growing membership there are many who have brothers, sons, and husbands in the Armed Forces?"

"Doubtless," Ross snapped. "Those who fight and suffer should have the greatest voice in the peace to come."

"No argument about that," Fowler agreed. "You have no information as to where the lists of prospective members come from. Yet to them go any amount of propaganda printed above your rubber-stamped signature. You wouldn't run a business that way, would you?"

"See here, I don't like your attitude, young man!"

"I can't help my attitude. I'm trying to get to the bottom of one of the lowest plots I've ever encountered."

"And I fail to see what the League could possibly have to do with sabotage in my plant!"

"There is a connection," Fowler said, his eyes narrowing. "Suppose an Axis-inspired rumor to the effect that American fighting men were inadequately equipped got out. Suppose that rumor had some base in fact on the failure of Inland life rafts. And they have failed, probably more times than we know about. Suppose such rumors just happen to reach the ears of someone who has loved ones in the Armed Forces.

"If followed by some League for Post-war Accord propaganda, it is reasonable to suppose that person would jump on the L.F. P.W.A. bandwagon because of normal anx-

iety. In Axis hands, such a group could sway public opinion favorably to our enemies."

Ross was trembling with rage. He shook a fist in the G-man's face.

"Sir, are you implying that I am in league with Fifth Columnists?"

"I am implying nothing. It's just something for you to think over . . . And you, Mr. Burch—you say you're a small stockholder in Inland Rubber, represent an association of small stockholders. I'd like you to define 'small.'"

Burch smiled. "I hold about four per cent of the stock, somewhat more than those I represent. There are three hundred and sixty odd small stockholders in Indianapolis. Mr. Ross, of course, has the controlling interest. I am naturally interested in this sabotage. If the Government contract is not renewed—which it won't be unless the trouble with the boats is discovered and corrected—Inland Rubber will be ruined. We small investors are not rich. We cannot afford the loss."

"Then you can rest assured that the Government will give Inland Rubber every chance to show where the fault lies before cancellation of the contract."

John Burch smiled broadly.

"That's a great load off my mind.

## CHAPTER VI

### *"Ox Car"*

HUGH MASON entered as Burch and Ross departed. The chief inspector seemed surprised that the G-man wanted to see him.

"Just a couple of questions," Fowler said. "First, are you a member of the League for Post-war Accord?"

Mason shook his head. "Much to Ross' disgust, I'm not. I'm not much for crusades."

"Why were you at the airport tonight?" the Federal man asked.

"It would be fatal, I presume," Mason said with a slight smile, "to admit that I went there to meet Jacob Sawer. He worked in my department and when he was going to Cincinnati and said he knew a professor there who might be able to shed some light on our trouble with the Inland boats I told him to go see the man."

"You met Sawer at the airport?"

"I did not. I did not see him until the body was taken from the test tank. I must have missed him at the airport because, since he had no baggage, he probably did not enter the station waiting room."

It was a perfectly logical explanation, dovetailing neatly.

"You believe that Sawer was killed because he had found some solution to the trouble with Inland boats?"

"Either that, or the saboteurs feared that he might make such a discovery."

"I agree with you, Mason. Now one more thing: At the airport, a young lady asked you for matches. You remember the incident?"

Mason nodded. "Very well. Also the young woman."

"You know her then?"

"I've never met her. But I saw her once—on the arm of Albert Ross as they were entering the Colonial Club."

Fowler brought out the matches the girl had dropped, watching Mason's face closely. The chief inspector's handsome features showed only a trace of curiosity.

"Are these the matches you handed her?" Fowler asked.

"I think not. She returned mine after lighting her cigarette."

The door of the cubicle was opened at that moment and Larry Kendal came in and stood quietly waiting.

"I'm sorry, Mason," Fowler said, "but I'll have to search you."

Mason shrugged, raised his hands above his head. Fowler missed nothing. He heaped Mason's belongings on the desk. Watch, wallet, and keycase were examined and returned, but what chiefly interested the G-man were the three books of paper matches, two of them identical with the one dropped by the girl.

"I'll keep these matches if you don't mind," he said.

"Not at all. If I had known you were collecting match covers I would have had a greater variety for you, Fowler. I'll keep you in mind."

"Do that," Fowler said, matching Mason's frosty tone.

"You've a master key to these lockers, haven't you, Hugh?" Kendal asked the chief inspector. "I'd like to look into Sawer's."

Mason jerked his head toward the desk. "Top drawer. Help yourself." He walked stiffly from the room.

Kendal slapped his thigh as the door closed. "Will Mason ever get the starch taken out of his stuffed shirt out there, Dan! The police found the murder weapon out in the scrap rubber pile. It's Mason's. Identified by a nick in the hasp."

Dan Fowler laughed shortly. "He'll have a logical explanation. He'll point out that if he wanted to murder he'd have taken somebody else's knife!"

"But why the attack on Sally? Why was it important to recover the knife?"

"To tighten the frame on Mason. Or, make it so obviously a frame on Mason that he'll not be under serious suspicion."

Larry Kendal opened the locker which had been used by Jacob Sawer.

"One thing has been cleaned up," he said.

"The police know who and what killed Mrs. Chapman. She had swallowed enough of the complex alkaloids of conium to knock over a horse, and it looks as though Jacob Sawer gave her the stuff."

KENDAL reached into the locker and took out a small green bottle labeled "PAIN-EEZ FOR HEADACHES." He shook out one of the white pills, put it down on the desk. With his fountain pen he gave the pill a sharp tap. A thin white shell of sugar coating broke away to reveal a small capsule containing a colorless liquid. A grin broke on Kendal's face.

"Get it? Sawer always carried a little silver pill box containing these tablets. He'd refill the box from this bottle. The killer has to be someone around the plant, someone who dumped out Sawer's headache medicine, replaced it with these things. These look like his headache pills, but that capsule contains conium or my nephew is a monkey. The same poison is in the silver box the police found in his pocket."

"And he gave one to Mrs. Chapman," Dan Fowler said. "Innocently, of course. That means there were two attempts made on Sawer's life. The first idea was to dispose of him by self-administered poison, but on his air trip, Sawer didn't take any of the pills. When that failed, his murderer knifed him when he showed up here."

"Which means," Kendal said, "that Sawer was on the trail of something big, perhaps why the Inland boats were going bad."

"Sawer left no notes, no records—nothing to give us a lead as to what he was working on?"

"If there was anything, it would have been destroyed—" Kendal paused, space staring for a moment. "There was a piece of paper folded and stuffed down into the watch pocket of his pants when they took him from the tank. The cops have it. It's wet, but you can read it."

He left the cubicle and returned in a moment with a piece of pasteboard on which the police had stuck the bit of wet paper found in Sawer's watch-pocket. On it was written in pencil:

Exceptions—Ox Car

"Mean anything to you, Dan'l?"

"'Ox Car,'" the Federal agent muttered. He shook his head. "Not a darned thing. I've heard of an ox cart, and I've heard of a mule car. But an ox car is a new one on me."

"What about those matches you lifted from Mason?" Kendal asked.

Fowler told his partner of his encounter with the girl at the airport and of the shot that had been fired at him as he was entering the taxi.

"You think the girl and her chauffeur figured you'd picked the matches up?" Kendal asked.

Fowler nodded. "Which would seem to indicate that the matches are of some importance. Take a look at them yourself."

But neither the match-book the girl had dropped nor those taken from Hugh Mason indicated anything to Kendal.

"And what's this Mason said about seeing the girl with Ross?" he asked. "You suppose he's got her interested in the League for Post-war Accord?"

Fowler suggested that they might ask Ross. When they left the cubicle, they paused only long enough for Kendal to hand over the bottle of poisoned headache pills to one of the Indianapolis police, then hurried into the yard where the rubber stock was piled.

As they crossed the yard, Fowler brought up another subject.

"I'd like to know whether John Burch is representing those three hundred and some small stockholders he mentioned, or whether he's secretly bought them all out. Inland stock must have fallen to a new low because of the question of whether or not the Government contract will be renewed, and there might be some chance for somebody to pull some sharp stock manipulation."

"I checked on that," Kendal said. "The small stockholders are sitting tight. There aren't any secret buyers."

When they entered the office reception room, from Albert Ross' private office sounded a chorus of angry voices, with John Burch's the loudest.

"Don't listen to him Albert! You can have King arrested for trespassing on property devoted to defense work."

"Keep your oar out of this, Burch!" another voice shouted. "I warned you, Ross, I'd make you pay for what you've done to me."

"To the last drop of blood, you said in your little letter to me," came Ross' voice. "You didn't sign it, King, but I recognized the technique." Ross chuckled. "Can I help it if you borrowed money and retooled your plant for making rubber boats before you'd salted the contract away?"

"Otis King of the King Rubber Company," Kendal whispered to Fowler. "When he lost the boat contract to Inland, he lost his shirt."

"And not above taking a little revenge," said Fowler. "Maybe we'd better crash the party."

FOWLER shouldered into the private office with Kendal close behind him. Sally was sitting beside Ross' desk. Ross was in his swivel chair. Behind him was John Burch, and the size of the man facing him completely eclipsed the Inland president.

Otis King wore a black slicker. Hands that must have been as large as hams were thrust deep into the pockets. He swiveled a big head around and blinked at the two G-men. A wide mouth lipped a huge cigar

that gave out noxious fumes.

Albert Ross' hard dark eyes flicked from Fowler to Kendal, then to King. His sharp voice clipped out an introduction of sorts.

"A one-time competitor of mine," he said. "Because he lost the Government contract for the boats, he had to sell his plant, and he seems to hold me responsible. Miss Vane and I found him hiding here when we returned."

"If you can feature anyone that size hiding!" Sally said.

"How'd he get in?" Kendal wanted to know.

"In the excitement over Sawer's murder," Burch explained, "one of the guards left his post. I took the liberty, Albert, of speaking to Withers about the guard. Don't you agree the man should be discharged?"

"I'll run my business my own way, John," Ross said sharply. He wagged a crooked finger at Otis King. "You're getting out of here. These two men are from the Federal Bureau of Investigation."

King waved his big head. "Any man who thinks he can take my living away from me and expect me to say, 'You're welcome' has another think coming. If I'm not permitted to do business, you're not going to do business either, Ross."

John Burch looked significantly from King to Dan Fowler.

"You think we may be able to do something about this fugitive from a fat salvage campaign? Or will we need a derrick?"

Otis King moved heavily back from Ross' desk. His clenched hand came from his pocket, carrying a blue steel automatic.

"I warned you I was desperate."

"Brother," Kendal said, "you're not desperate—you're crazy!"

Sally Vane suddenly sprang from her chair, her eyes wide as she stared out the office window. Then Fowler saw it—a faint flush of ruddy wavering light illuminating the stock piles in the yard. Leaping to the window, he saw flame behind a window in the other wing.

"Fire!" Sally cried.

Dan Fowler wheeled around, saw the curious change that came over Otis King's fat face. First his eyes mirrored bewilderment as he too saw the fire across the yard. Then his lips curled into a smile of triumph.

"It would appear," King said, "as though the gods of justice had heard my plea. There seems to be a fire in your bays, Albert. Those cheap wood partitions of yours will go plenty fast once they get started!"

Dan Fowler reached for the phone on Albert Ross' desk. The gun in King's hand tilted upward, the muzzle centering the G-man's forehead. King's doughy face was bathed in sweat.

"Don't try it," he warned. "I haven't any quarrel with you. Only with Ross. I didn't start this fire, understand? But now that it has started, if you touch that phone I'll blast you!"

John Burch flicked Fowler a warning glance. "I think he means that. He's just crazy."

"But my plant!" Ross shrilled. "It'll burn down. It's sabotage!"

"I'm seeing to it that you don't stop that fire," King said. "Now you'll lose your business as I lost mine."

The two G-men exchanged swift glances.

"Larry," Fowler said, "remember Looey Muzzini in Chicago two years ago? It was like this. He thought he had the drop on us."

Kendal nodded. He and Fowler took a step forward stopped, tensed like half-backs awaiting signals. Big Otis King's gun swung in a short arc to include them both.

"He's just like Looey Muzzini," Fowler drawled. "He thinks it's sure death through the head, when any fool knows it's surer through the middle."

## CHAPTER VII

### *Death-Trap*

THAT was the signal. Otis King lowered his gun a little way to correct his error, and the two G-men moved—Fowler in a forward lunge, Kendal to King's left. It was perfectly timed, deceptive. Dan Fowler's left arm swept King's gun arm to one side. King fired just one wild shot before Kendal had the fat man's wrist in a viselike grip. Kendal practically yanked King into the path of Dan Fowler's uppercut.

King hit the floor like an Alpine landslide. His fall threatened to bring down the plaster, but after that blow he didn't know what a marvelous impression he made on the floor. Kendal flung King's gun on Ross' desk as Sally reached for the phone to call the Fire Department.

The Federal agents dashed out, legging toward the fire in the other wing.

"That fire's not in the bays, Dan!" Kendal shouted. "Looks more like the paper stock room!"

So Otis King hadn't started the fire. He had thought it was in the bays. But he had welcomed the fire that might destroy Ross' plant, had attempted to delay efforts to quench it.

Kendal led the way through a door in the side of the building, flung up an arm to point at a steel door that stood ajar. They could see the ever-changing pattern of ruddy light and shadow. Kendal dived for a fire extinguisher and stopped short with hands outstretched.

"Look!" he cried, pointing to the bottom of the tank.

A small hole had been punched through the brass case and the sodium bicarbonate solution had drained out.

Fowler raced back into the vast molding room, or bays. And another racked fire extinguisher there had been punctured.

"How about the carbon dioxide inflators?" he shouted to Kendal.

"We might hold it in check that way. Come on!"

They sped into the room where inflators and couplings were added to the finished boat. Dan Fowler hoisted a carton of inflators onto a broad shoulder, started back while Kendal emerged from a corner with a long metal tube tapered like a slim trumpet or megaphone—a nozzle for using the inflators as fire extinguishers. Whoever had provided such a nozzle deserved an "A" for effort, anyway, even if a single inflator wouldn't furnish more than about a ten-second burst of the smothering gas in an emergency.

Outside the door of the paper stock room, Fowler fitted the nozzle to one of the inflators.

Holding the nozzle by rubber grips to avoid the intense cold that would be formed by the escaping gas, both G-men rushed through the door. Huge rolls of paper were stacked against the walls, leaving a space of about twelve feet between. The rolls were in flames—flames laced with streams of black oil smoke. No accident, this. It was a deliberate attempt to knock the Inland plant out of the war effort.

A moment before Dan Fowler opened the inflator-valve, he was struck by a strange premonition. If whoever had started the fire had put the extinguishers out of business, why hadn't he disposed of the nozzle capable of converting the inflators into extinguishers? Perhaps that person had figured that the inflators represented a puny defense against such a raging fire—as they did.

Fowler screwed down on the "T" handle of the inflator-valve, forcing the piercing pin through the seal of the metal gas bottle. Liquid gas burst from the wide end of the nozzle Kendal held, shot out toward the flames along the north wall. A white-hot blast of flame roared up the wall to the ceiling. Kendal cursed as he flung down the improvised extinguisher, staring wild-eyed at blue-white flame like the blast of a cutting torch, feeding the blazing paper instead of smothering the fire.

"Dan!" he shouted. "That's not carbon dioxide! That's—"

No need to finish. Both men knew why the Inland boats had taken untold numbers of lives of brave men in the fighting forces. The trouble began outside the Inland factory. Someone was substituting some gas corrosive for the carbon dioxide that was supposed to be in the inflators.

INSTANTLY Dan Fowler knew that unless he and Larry Kendal got out of there in a hurry they were a couple of fried oysters. He seized his partner, dazed by their startling discovery, and shoved him toward the door. But even as they reached it, a black-gloved hand shot out to slam the door in thier faces. The steel panel rang like a death gong. The snap-lock shot its bolt. The G-men flung their combined weight against the door, but it didn't yield a fraction of an inch.

"Got us!" Kendal rolled his eyes toward the flames that were creeping across the ceiling to form an infernal arch above their heads.

"Because we know," Fowler croaked.

He pulled his heavy gun, added its thunderous roar to the crackle of flame. He emptied the clip directly over the lock, but the steel was like armor plate and the bullets rebounded to whine off into the stacks of burning paper.

"The window!" Fowler rapped.

He picked up the improvised fire extinguisher, dashed back between pillars of flame toward the window through which they had first seen the fire. It was ten to twelve feet above the floor and wide enough for them to escape if they could reach it.

"Here, Larry!" Fowler had disconnected the inflator from the nozzle. He handed the inflator to Kendal. "Knock out the window with that. Let's go! It's hotter than Death Valley in here."

He stooped, bracing himself by grasping his knees in his hands.

"No!" Kendal choked. "I'll give you a leg-up!"

Fowler wheeled, his eyes blazing.

"Do I have to sock you and pitch you out the window? Get up on my shoulders and through that window. Then you can lend me a hand. That's an order, pal!"

Again he bent over. Kendal kicked off his shoes, stuck them into the pockets of his smock. He sprang onto Dan Fowler's back, splayed fingers seeking a grip on the sheer face of the wall. Fowler slowly straightened upright, legs spread, arms braced against the wall. Steadying himself with one hand, Larry Kendal knocked over the latch of the window. The steel casement was hinged at the bottom and fell inward.

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Lifting the sash from its snap hinges, he tossed it to the floor. He took the steel frame in both hands and his weight lifted from Fowler's shoulders, scrambled through the window to sit on the sill, his legs dangling.

"Grab a couple of ankles, Dan!"

It was at that moment that one of the blazing stacks of paper gave way. Huge rolls weighing hundreds of pounds thundered down onto the floor. Fowler flattened himself against the wall beneath the window. The aisle was a sheet of flame.

Fowler tried springing for Kendal's dangling feet, but fell short by a good six inches.

"No good!" he shouted. "Get a ladder. Get something!"

Kendal disappeared through the window and Fowler turned to face the ravening flames. Draft drew fire toward him, rustled a paper wrapper from one of the rolls on the floor. That wrapper had burned to a white ash against which the name of the manufacturer stood out in bold relief. And even in that moment of facing death, the Federal man had a vaguely odd memory of the matches he had picked up at the airport. That paper wrapper reminded him of them and lent the matches a new significance. But would he live to follow the clue? And if he didn't, there was still Kendal.

He stripped off his coat. One of the pockets contained the matches that had to be saved even if Fowler himself perished. He wadded the coat into a ball, pitched it up through the window. Eyes closed against the searing flames, he waited for help.

FROM the yard he heard the crash of gunfire—three shots. Was the killer gunning for Kendal, to make sure that neither G-man lived to follow the trail that would inevitably lead to this unspeakable creature who murdered with impunity,

"Dan!"

Fowler opened his eyes, to be all but blinded by smoke. A strangling cough racked throat and lungs.

"Dan, grab the hose! Climb! Or just hang on and I'll pull you up!"

Fowler's fingers found a length of rubber hose that his partner had thrown through the open window. He seized it, braced his feet against the wall, climbed hand over hand until he could grip the window frame. He thrust his head into the open, sobbed in air. Getting through the window, his legs felt like weighted lead. He fell to the ground and was immediately hauled to his feet by Kendal and a policeman.

"What was the shooting?" he choked.

"Oh, somebody back of one of those scrap piles didn't like the idea of me tossing you a life-line," Kendal said cheerfully. "I might have got him, only I thought you'd like to get to a cooler climate."

## CHAPTER VIII

### *The Mask*

RENDEZVOUSING in an all night lunch room a block from the Inland factory, Larry Kendal, Dan Fowler, and Sally Vane held a hurried consultation. The fire had been brought under control before it could damage the factory itself, though the paper stock was destroyed. Big fat Otis King, alternately roaring imprecations and blubbering about his innocence, had been hauled away by the police for questioning.

Albert Ross offered little explanation about the girl at the airport. Mason had said she was Ross' friend, but the Inland president claimed even to have forgotten her name. She was simply a member of the League for Post-war Accord, and he couldn't be expected to remember the names of all the members. He had escorted her to the Colonial Club that evening to attend a special dinner of the League, and others had been in the party.

The inflators for the Inland rubber boats were manufactured in New Haven and they were distributed locally by the Prefex Bottled Gas Company with offices on Capitol Avenue. Dan Fowler had made a mental note of the address.

"Several things came to me while I was getting myself toasted in that fire-trap," he explained in a low voice. "I think I know what Sawer referred to in that notation found on his body—about 'ox car.' Sawer had no knowledge of chemistry, did he?"

"I gathered, the few times I saw him, that he hadn't much knowledge of anything," Sally said.

"He was no chemist," Kendal said. "Mason is a chemist and first class scientist. But Sawer didn't know beans."

"Then the meaning of 'ox car' becomes pretty clear. Sawer must have got the idea that if nothing wrong could be found about the rubber boats themselves, the trouble must be in the inflators. He probably kept that to himself, wanting full credit for the discovery in case he was correct. So he went to Cincinnati, to check with some scientist friend there about certain gases that will corrode rubber and which might be substituted for carbon dioxide in the inflators."

"Everybody in the inspection office knew Sawer was making that trip," Kendal cut in. "And he was so mysterious about it, anybody could have guessed he was on the trail of it. So the killer decided Sawer had lived long enough."

"Now, about 'ox car,'" Fowler said. "A person who knows nothing of chemistry

might use 'ox' as an abbreviation for oxygen, and 'car' for carbon."

"Neither of which is injurious to rubber, though," Kendall said. "Though maybe a concentration of oxygen might hasten the rotting of rubber if there was some other factor present."

"That's it," Fowler insisted. "Another chemical was present. You'll find two gases in those inflators. There will be liquid oxygen to inflate the boats and another gas that is destructive to rubber. Fluorine will unite with metals and all but a few chemical elements. The two common exceptions are oxygen and carbon."

Kendal snapped his fingers. "There you are! Sawer's notation was, 'Exceptions—ox car.' He meant this gas he'd learned about wouldn't unite with oxygen and carbon."

"I think," Dan Fowler said, "that when the inflators are examined we'll find liquid oxygen, which would account for our ill-luck trying to put out a fire with the stuff, and also a small quantity of fluorine."

"If fluorine attacks metals," Sally said, "why doesn't it escape from the metal cylinders of the inflators?"

Fowler shrugged. "Maybe somebody has found a way of lining those cylinders with carbon. The gas would be harmless until the piercing pin of the valve breaks the seal and releases the gas into the boats. Then the gas goes to work on the rubber, and a few hours later there's a leak. Since the trouble is in the bottled gas, our next move would be to take a long close look at this Prefex Bottled Gas Company."

"What about Ross' gal friend?" Kendal asked. "You think she may be the Mata Hari the Director mentioned—the lady who was responsible for the theft of the War Office listings?"

Dan Fowler nodded grimly. "Somebody in the League for Post-war Accord is using that listing. That girl has what it takes to make putty out of a man. And there's that match trick she pulled with Mason. Maybe he didn't know what she was up to. But I think I've got the answer to her little stunt."

HE BROUGHT out the book of matches the girl had dropped, and also the matches he had taken from Mason. One at a time he pulled Mason's matches from the books, lighted each one, blew out the flame, then examined the burned heads.

"It would be possible to write something on these black match heads," he explained, "And the writing wouldn't show up until after the match had been lighted and blown out. Ink and pencil lines aren't readily obliterated by fire."

He continued lighting matches until he had burned all that he had taken from Mason. None revealed any secret writings. But when he had blown out the first match taken from the girl's pack, he got results. There, against the gray-white of the burned match head was the figure "6."

"Now we progress," Sally sighed.

"I wonder." Fowler lighted another, which produced an "L." The third gave him "3" and the fourth a second "3." The fifth match revealed a letter "N" and the sixth an "M." All the other matches in the book were blanks.

"Any North M street in town?"

Kendal shook his head. "But the 'M' might abbreviate Meridian—Fifth Avenue to Indianapolis. It divides the town into east and west."

"Then we may as well settle on the address idea," Fowler said. "Which you want to tackle—the Meridian address of the Prefex Gas Company?"

"Personally," Kendal grinned—"I'd prefer the irresistible gal, but we'll toss a coin."

Kendal's toss gave him his preference. He would investigate the mysterious address, while Fowler covered the bottled gas company.

"Now?" Sally asked. "It's after midnight."

"All the better for prowling," Kendal said.

"What do you expect me to do?" she wanted to know. "Go to my hotel and twiddle my fingers?"

"Exactly," Fowler insisted. "Stick close to the phone, and if either Larry or I get in trouble, we'll give you a ring. You're our lifeline, see?"

And as Sally grumbled a little, Dan Fowler put a hand on his partner's shoulder.

"Just one thing more, Larry. If Mason was telling the truth about not knowing the girl, then she didn't switch match-books out there at the airport. It could have all been an act to call my attention to the matches. The fuss the chauffeur made about finding them, the potshot taken at me might be parts of an act. She may have wanted me to investigate them, find the address secreted in the match heads. It could be a booby trap."

Kendal's laugh cut him short. "I get it. You'd like to investigate the address yourself. The girl must be a honey." And he left the table.

Twenty minutes before one, a taxi put Dan Fowler down on Capitol Avenue. The Prefex Bottled Gas Company was diagonally across the street, a small red brick building between a used auto parts shop and an electrical contractor's office.

No one was in the deserted street when Fowler passed the gas company building, and went up a narrow alley between the building and the auto parts shop, to find himself in a dark and littered yard. Silently he picked his way to the back door and fingered the keyhole. From his pocket he took a ring of skeleton keys and began trying one after the other.

"I have a key that fits."

The whispering voice from within a yard of Fowler. He dropped the keys, a hand streaking upward toward his shoulder holster

as he spun around. But before his fingers could touch the butt of the weapon, the muzzle of a revolver was rammed up under his left arm. Of the person who held the weapon, he could see nothing except a dim silhouette. A hand flicked the G-man's gun from its holster.

"I have a key that fits," the whisperer repeated. Gloved fingers thrust a key into Fowler's hand. "Go on—open the door. You want to see what is inside, don't you?"

The Federal agent's hands were steady as he thrust the key into the lock, with the revolver muzzle in his back. He stepped into darkness that was total, heard the man with the gun shut the door behind them.

"Stand perfectly still, please."

A SWITCH snicked. A dim yellow bulb illuminated a store-room where tall narrow cylinders of soda fountain gas stood in metal racks; where there were cartons of smaller cylinders of the sort furnished as inflators for the Inland boats.

"This is where the dirty work is done, I suppose?" Fowler said.

"Right. Here we do a little substitution, releasing the carbon dioxide as it comes from the manufacturer in New Haven, spray the inside of the containers with a suspension of pure carbon, refill the cylinders from liquid oxygen and a small amount of liquid fluorine . . . Just go straight ahead. You'll know all before you know nothing, Mr. Fowler. You are Fowler, aren't you?"

The G-man laughed coolly. "And darned well you know it! We've met before."

"To the left now," the whispering voice said, "and through that little door, Fowler. Mr. Rambeaux has a complete laboratory in there. A very clever man. His genius is responsible for the confining of fluorine gas to the boat inflators."

"And no doubt responsible for disguising conium poison capsules as a simple headache remedy," Fowler said. "Though, since he could hardly have had access to Sawer's locker, someone in the Inland inspection department must have pulled that trick."

The whisperer chuckled. "Unfortunately Sawer didn't develop a headache. Conium would have provided a more merciful death than the knife."

Dan Fowler pushed open the little door, stepped into the room beyond. It was a complete laboratory, and also held two large compressors for liquifying gases.

"Fowler, permit me to introduce Mr. Louis Rambeaux. If you will just turn a little to your right—"

Dan Fowler turned slowly. In a corner, slumped down on the floor with head and shoulder supported by the walls, was a lean, dark man with a carefully trimmed black beard. In the exact center of his forehead was a small dark hole from which blood crawled down the side of a thin, straight nose.

"Mr. Rambeaux came to America at the tender age of eight," whispered the man with the gun, "and was so impressed that he became a citizen. Quite a loyal citizen, too. He couldn't have been induced to lend me his scientific knowledge if it hadn't been that his sister is held as a hostage in a concentration camp in France."

Dan Fowler wheeled to face the man with the gun. The fellow wore a raincoat that enveloped him from shoulder to ankles. Beneath his black hat he wore a black silk mask with eye-holes.

"No heroics over a dead man, please," said the mocking whisper. "Believe me, I'd rather not shoot you."

"Don't you Nazis know when you're licked?" Fowler barked.

"We may lose this war, but not the next. Because we shall not lose the peace, Mr. Fowler. You have no idea how the League for Post-War Accord is growing. Your own citizens will help us win the peace." The man laughed shortly. "But we waste time, Fowler."

He moved to the sink where, supported vertically in a ringstand, was a metal gas cylinder about a foot in length. A black coated valve was attached to the top.

"Fluorine," he explained. "Get the picture, Fowler, as it will appear to the police. You have followed the case of the Inland rubber boats to its logical conclusion, and have discovered that Louis Rambeaux is your villain. Rambeaux, in resisting arrest, turns the valve of this fluorine cylinder. You shoot him through the head, but before you can get clear from the room you are overcome by the gas."

"You won't forget to put your gun in my hand, will you?" Fowler asked dryly.

"I won't forget." The masked man put a black-gloved hand on the gas valve. Above the glove, Fowler saw a gold wrist-watch.

"Just a second," Fowler said conversationally. "Tonight, after you had killed Sawer, you made a certain mistake in the inspection office at the Inland plant." As he spoke the G-man coolly rested his hand on the gooseneck water faucet. "Others noticed that slip and may have interpreted it correctly. It points to you as Sawer's murdered."

THE clue to which Fowler referred pointed equally to two men. But he had to gain time to try one final trick which, if it did not save his life, would give him the satisfaction of knowing which of those two suspects was the guilty man.

The masked man chuckled. "These last few seconds of life you find precious, don't you, Fowler? Sorry we can't prolong this. I'll just open the valve, run to the door, and leave you for the police to find. You won't be pretty."

Even as the masked man opened the valve, Dan Fowler turned the handle of the faucet, turned on the water full pressure. Abruptly

the sink was like a volcano that had erupted. Scalding vapor, heat without flame, gray clouds mushroomed up, acrid, lung-searing fumes, biting droplets of acid that spewed out in all directions.

Dan Fowler had flung himself back as far as he could from the sink. He had flung up an arm to shield his face against the acid that had been immediately formed by the union of the fluorine with the water. For that acid, hydro-fluoric, was so corrosive that even glass could not long contain it.

The man in the mask was somewhere on the other side of the room, making for the door, pouring shot after shot back through the cloud of vapor. Fowler whirled to the corner of the room where dead Louis Rambeaux lay. He yanked the corpse upright, shoved it in front of him, flung it straight at the blaze of gun flame from the killer's weapon.

The masked man fired three rapid shots. Afterward it was learned that all three found their mark in Louis Rambeaux' body. Satisfied that he had disposed of Fowler, the masked man dashed through the laboratory door and slammed it after him. Inches behind him was Dan Fowler, with blood in his eye.

The door was locked. And for the second time that night, the G-man found himself faced with a window crack-out. He picked up the nearest chunk of metal he could lay hands on—a ring stand—and sent it crashing through the window above the lab bench. He vaulted onto the bench, went through the window, heedless of jagged broken glass. He hit the narrow alley between buildings and as he raced toward the front he heard a motor starting in the street.

But for all his long legs, for all the tireless energy that constant training and straight living had built into the muscles of his body, the tail-lamps of the killer's car were winking ironically at him by the time he reached the sidewalk.

Dan Fowler stood on the curb and indulged in a little pardonable profanity.

## CHAPTER IX

### *The Lady Collects*

ENTERING the phone booth of a cheap little hotel on Illinois Street, Dan Fowler telephoned Sally Vane at the Riley House. She asked him if he was in trouble—she hoped.

"I just missed snagging our man by a couple of inches," Fowler told her. "But aside from turning up another cadaver, no trouble to speak of. Have you heard from Larry?"

"No," Sally said. "He must have found Mata Hari and taken her for a stroll in the rain. You don't think she'd be working her girlish wiles on Larry, do you?"

"Hardly," Fowler said with a laugh. "But I'll check to make sure."

"And what'll I do?" wailed Sally.

"Knit me a shroud, honey," he said. "With ruffles."

He hung up and went out to pick up a taxi. That premonition that the airport girl's trick with the matches was really bait for a trap was becoming increasingly strong. She could have been posted at the airport to watch for Dan Fowler. If she had been able to filch secret listings from the offices of the War Department, she probably was quite capable of keeping track of the movements of Dan Fowler when he had headed for the center of the present activity of the spy system to which she belonged.

Her trap may or may not have closed on Larry Kendal. But it was best for Fowler to walk in with his eyes open. He regretted the loss of his gun, but he had stepped into many another adventure bare-handed.

The house on North Meridian was set far back on a wooded lot. It was low, rambling with picture windows softly illuminated by lamps. It didn't look like the abode of a lady spy. But under the present Nazi espionage system no one could be absolutely sure a next-door neighbor was not in the pay of Hitler.

The front door stood slightly ajar, and that in itself had a suspicious look at this hour of the morning. A radio played softly as Fowler tiptoed onto the porch. He peered through a small hall and into a living room beyond. Of the girl he had encountered at the airport, he could see nothing except a well-turned ankle, a charming, slippered foot, and a hand that held a magazine. She was seated in a lounge chair.

Fowler stepped into the hall. To his right was a staircase with a wrought iron rail leading down into a basement. To his left was a small closet. As his eyes dropped to the floor in front of the closet, a slow smile spread his lips. The corner of an Oriental throw rug was so carelessly tipped up over the edge of that door! Any movement of the door would have altered the position of the rug. A simple signal. Surely Larry Kendal wouldn't have fallen for a gag like that.

Or perhaps Kendal had seen the rug, realized its purpose, and had decided to do just what Dan Fowler was going to do—open the closet door and go in anyway if the girl in the living room made the slightest move.

She moved. Her magazine rustled shut and she stood up. Fowler stepped swiftly to the closet, went inside, closed the door.

"Now," he thought, "it's your move."

He was certain now that the girl's actions at the airport had been part of an act to get him in a trap to catch him alive. That seemed to indicate that the girl and Sawer's murderer

were not working together for Sawer's killer had tried hard enough to bring Dan Fowler back dead!

He could hear high heels tapping on the tile floor of the hall. He knew she had seen that the rug in front of the door was not in the position she had so carefully left it. As he waited, something happened which he had not anticipated. His ankles touched something tautly stretched across the floor. A container of some sort was tipped over and the floor of the closet was flooded with some cool, volatile liquid. Pungent fumes assailed his nostrils. And at that instant the girl in the hall flung herself against the door and twisted a key in the lock.

"You wouldn't try shooting out the lock, would you?" she said in the smooth, beautiful voice that had first attracted his attention. "Because that stuff on the floor is ether. Gun sparks could cause an explosion that would take the roof right off the house. And you with it."

"You'd go along with me, wouldn't you?" Dan Fowler called through the closet door.

She laughed. "Why, it's Mr. Fowler! I recognize your voice. I was afraid you'd never find my address on those match heads!"

"Suppose I shoot straight through the panel," he said. "It would be worth going through the roof if I could take Hitler's most beautiful and accomplished spy with me."

"That's either pure flattery or pure bluff," she said. "And I'm immune to both. You'd better just grin and take it—lying down."

He took a shallow breath, but the fumes of the ether already had his head in a whirl. The lady had wits behind that beautiful face of hers. . . .

OUTSIDE the closet the girl leaned against the door, a strange smile on her red lips. She listened to the sounds that came from the closet. When all was silent behind that door, she walked swiftly into the living room, picked up a telephone on a table and dialed. When her call was answered, she said quietly:

"I have Fowler for you—finally. Two G-men in a single night. That's not bad. And I think, under the circumstances, something is due me in addition to congratulations. It's well to serve the Fatherland, but I can't overlook my personal comforts. There will be a small charge—say four or five thousand dollars—for the delivery of Dan Fowler."

She listened a moment, eyes narrow, her smile traced with scorn.

"Oh, solely for the love of the Leader? Don't be absurd! I happen to know who took advantage of Otis King, when losing the rubber boat contract dropped King Rubber Company stock to a give-away price. You own King Rubber, and with Inland ruined, King Rubber will land that fat government contract." She laughed. "You'll reap a million dollar harvest—for the love of the Leader. Has it occured to you that as secret owner of the King Rubber Company you will be profiting from weapons of war manufactured for use against soldiers of the Reich? And do you now comprehend why you must present me with a substantial gift for the delivery of Dan Fowler into your hands?"

As the girl listened, a glow of satisfaction came into her blue eyes.

"Very well. In thirty minutes, then, I will bring Dan Fowler to headquarters. And you can buy my silence on your business venture. Heil Hitler!"

She uttered this last with a faint note of mockery in her voice, as though she could see on which side of Hitler's bread was the butter. For she was a clever young woman with no blind loyalty except to her own pretty self.

When finally she returned to the hall, and unlocked and opened the closet door, Dan Fowler's long figure was huddled and motionless on the floor.

She pressed a nearby bell push, and her swarthy chauffeur put in his appearance.

"We have another Federal man, Arnold," she said coolly. "Bind him securely in case he comes out from under the ether before the—operation. . . ."

For not even a second had Dan Fowler been under the influence of the ether. No sooner had he realized the nature of the trap into which he had deliberately walked than he took from his pocket a slim silver mechanical pencil. He pulled off the tip and cap of the pencil, thrust the slender barrel into the keyhole of the closet door. Pinching his nostrils tightly shut, he had taken the other end of the pencil tube into his mouth, had been able to draw in enough fresh air through the keyhole to keep himself fully conscious.

Not a word of the girl's phone conversation escaped him. He knew then that the spy behind the entire plot, the murderer of Sawer, Rambeaux and Mrs. Chapman—of unknown numbers of American flyers who had died at sea—was not above picking up a dishonest dollar in the course of his service to Nazi Germany.

He had picked up King Rubber stock at rock-bottom prices, and doing everything possible to ruin Inland Rubber through sabotage.

King Rubber would snare the fat Government contracts, and the spy would stand ready to cash in for enormous profits.

Fowler, however, gave no indications that he was not completely overcome by the ether. Apparently he was still out when he was left in a small, bare room, dimly illuminated by a single undersized bulb in the ceiling. He had been carried up a flight of steps and from the rumble of presses he heard, believed he was above a printing shop. When Arnold, the swarthy chauffeur for the girl

spy dumped him and left, Fowler opened his eyes.

"Well, Dan, how goes it?"

Larry Kendal's voice came in a whisper from his left. Fowler turned his head stiffly, saw his partner lying on the floor not far away. Like Fowler, Kendal was securely tied with sash rope.

"I know the nicest addresses, don't I?" Fowler said.

"Ha!" Kendal snorted. "I didn't get a peep at the gal. I thought the front of the house too darned inviting, so I went around in back to give her a surprise party. I was the guy who was surprised. That chauffeur got behind me and—wham!"

"How long have you been here?"

"About an hour. Long enough to know what goes on. The girl and her pals are having a get-together in the next room. They work with or maybe through the League for Post-war Accord, and they're using those lists from the War Department to mail propaganda. And the print shop is downstairs to turn it out."

Dan Fowler, with his arms bound behind him, and his legs tied from knees to ankles, began squirming slowly toward Kendal.

"And we're slated for a rub-out," Kendal said. "We're to turn up in a ditch, tomorrow, after a nice quiet drive into the country."

"That's what they think."

Fowler bent his head down, raised his left shoulder as far as possible. He hooked his chin on the edge of his stiffened coat lapel, drew the lapel up. With his tongue he could reach a small tab of black tape beneath the lapel. He gradually worked the tape into his teeth, gave it a jerk. This pulled a single-edged razor blade from a secret slit. The blade fell to the floor. Squirming around a little more, he could just reach the blade with his fingers.

"Turn over," he whispered to Kendal. The younger G-man turned over and, with Fowler holding the blade tightly, sawed back and forth against it with the rope that confined his wrists. As soon as his hands were free, he set to work to liberate Fowler.

"In case things don't turn out quite right," Fowler said, "there's a couple of things to consider. I mean, if you get out of here and I don't, I want you to recall something that happened in Mason's office, right after we discovered Sally had been bopped on the head."

"What about it?"

"Sally asked for water. John Burch went to get it and he and Hugh Mason collided as Burch turned from the water cooler. It's hard to tell whether Mason ran into Burch on purpose or whether Burch purposely ran into Mason. Both got splashed with water, but I think that collision was planned by one or the other to account for water already on shoes and trousers. Whoever tried to drown me in the test tank would certainly have been splashed."

"So you sift it down to Mason or Burch," Kendal said, then swiftly cautioned silence as he severed the last rope.

Footsteps were whispering just outside the door.

## CHAPTER X

### *Spy Leader*

SWIFTLY Dan Fowler sprang to his feet, took soundless steps to the right of the door. He was hidden by it as it opened. The chauffeur, Arnold, stepped into the room, started toward Kendal's recumbent figure.

Dan Fowler pushed the door shut, sprang at the stocky man from behind. Long, powerful fingers hooked around Arnold's throat, stifled any possible outcry. The man made an effort to reach his gun. Though Kendal's legs were still roped, he shot out his hands to snatch Arnold's gun as soon as it cleared leather. A twist of the wrist and the man was disarmed.

As swiftly Kendal swept the gun toward and slashed down with it. The chauffeur went limp, and hit the floor.

"As I was saying when we were so rudely interrupted," Fowler said coolly, "there's something you ought to know in case I don't come out of this in such good shape."

"Yeah? You said Burch or Mason is the killer. Which one? Mason, the stuffed shirt?"

Fowler was kneeling beside the chauffeur, unstrapping Arnold's black puttees.

"Oh, no. John Burch is the man behind all this. . . . Here!" He pushed the puttees over to Kendal who had cut the last ropes that bound his legs "Put on those puttees. With these, and his cap and coat, maybe you can steal first base. I'm too tall. And get me a gun. Don't try to hog the show."

Kendal grinned. "There must be six or seven of them out there. Who do you think I am—Superman?"

But Larry Kendal hurriedly put on the puttees, then switched coats with the unconscious Arnold.

"How come you suddenly decide that Burch is our killer?" he asked.

"Because," Fowler explained, "in the Prefex Gas Company laboratory where the fluorine is put in the boat inflators, the murderer tried to kill me with fluorine gas. He watched me put my hand on the water faucet, and any chemist would know that if I turned on that water the fluorine would unite with it in a violent reaction. From our two suspects, subtract Mason, the chemist, and you have John Burch left."

As Kendal pulled the chauffeur's cap over his eyes, Fowler suggested:

"You could be blowing your nose when you go out there. The handkerchief would hide your pan."

Kendal shoved Arnold's gun into his coat pocket, pulled out his handkerchief, and covered his nose and mouth as he opened the door.

Dan Fowler caught a glimpse of several people sitting about a table that was laden with envelopes and papers. Larry Kendal boldly approached the table.

John Burch was there, his face sleek, pink, and genial. The girl was there, her blue eyes on the propaganda leaflets she was stuffing into envelopes. And four men Dan Fowler had never seen before. None of them looked like Nazis. None even faintly resembled bullet-headed Teutons. They were just men who would be lost in even a small roomful of honest Americans. And that undoubtedly, was why they had been chosen for their peculiar work.

Larry Kendal, still mopping his face with his handkerchief, touched one of the men on the shoulder, crooked a beckoning finger as the man glanced up. The man got out of his chair, started toward the door of the room where the two G-men had been confined. He paused, turned suddenly on Kendal, close at his heels, and pulled a gun.

But faster still was Larry Kendal. One roaring shot took the spy in the chest. He came up on his toes, his gun dropping from wide-spread fingers. Kendal caught the toppling figure, held it upright as for a shield against the four men and the woman. He heel-kicked the fallen gun in the general direction of Dan Fowler.

FOWLER lunged for the gun that came sliding across the floor, and on one knee he sighted and fired at a man at the left end of the table. He was deliberate about it. He shot to kill, for in his mind's eye was a picture of bleak ocean spaces where American boys were frantically and fruitlessly trying to plug a hole in a leaking life raft.

Two men and the woman raised their hands as the G-men advanced. But John Burch had a notion he could make it to the door.

"Hold it, Burch!" Fowler shouted. "You're under arrest!"

Burch had a hand on the door knob. Three times in the past six hours he had moved fast enough to give Dan Fowler the slip, and thought he could do it again. Fowler shot at Burch's legs, determined that John Burch should die in the electric chair. Burch sank slowly to the floor, his hands still clinging to the door knob.

From there on, the F.B.I. Field Office and the Indianapolis Police Squad For the Investigation of Subversive Activities took over. Aside from the capture of the spies—all members in good standing in the League for Post-war Accord—a strange front-page news story came from that room and from the print shop below.

The stolen lists from the War Department offices were found. And for every name on the casualty list a letter of condolence had been sent to the "next of kin" over the rubber-stamped signature of Albert Ross, president of the League. These letters urged that the loved ones who survived to join and contribute to the League, "that peace may come swiftly—a just and generous peace."

Probably the most surprised person in the city was Albert Ross, when he realized he had actually lent his money and support to an organization dedicated to leniency for aggressors who had ravaged the earth.

John Burch was taken under guard to the City Hospital with a bullet in each leg, his genial smile wiped forever from his lips. He had two alternatives—to face a firing squad for treachery and sabotage against the United States in time of war, or go to the chair for murder.

"And we've got him cold on the murder charge," Dan Fowler explained to Sally Vane and Larry Kendal after the sound and fury was over. "When Burch thought he had me cornered in Rambeaux's laboratory, he admitted putting poison pills into the bottle of Sawer's headache medicine, and when that failed that he had killed Sawer with a knife. He was just leaving the scene of his third kill—that of Louis Rambeaux—when he encountered me. Burch wore a mask, but when he tried to kill me with fluorine and I turned on the water, the hydro-fluoric acid produced spattered on Burch's watch crystal, etching the glass, marking him as the killer. He carried that clue right with him to the hospital—and into the hands of the cops."

"Mason didn't have a thing to do with the dirty work?" Sally asked.

"Not a thing. Burch made an effort to frame him by using Mason's knife. Mason was telling the absolute truth from beginning to end. Our girl spy—her real name is Gretchen Miller—gave Mason's matches back to him at the airport. The switch was a phony, pulled for my benefit. Then she dropped the matches, intended for me to pick them up, had her chauffeur take a shot at me—all with the idea of making me think the matches were an important clue. Actually, she was simply baiting a trap for Larry and me."

"She wanted to horn in on Burch's profits, too," Kendal put in. "Burch was confident that the sabotage would ruin Inland Rubber's chances of landing another contract. Burch had been buying King Rubber Company stock until he practically owned it all. King Rubber was all re-tooled to build rubber boats and would doubtless land the contract Inland would be forced to drop."

FOWLER nodded.

"Remember," he said, "when I told Burch and Ross that I thought the Gov-

ernment would allow Inland to go on manufacturing boats until the trouble was pinned directly on Inland? That was a blow to Burch, so great a one that he tried to set the whole factory on fire."

"And the trouble wasn't in the Inland plant at all," Sally said.

"And not in the inflators as originally manufactured,' said Fowler. "Burch compelled Louis Rambeaux to substitute oxygen and fluorine for the carbon dioxide originally supplied. Rambeaux did it to save his sister, hostage in a French concentration camp."

"I don't quite understand why Otis King kicked up such a fuss, though, if he no longer had any holdings in the King Rubber Company,' Sally said.

"Oh, King lost the boat contract after he had spent a lot of money re-tooling his factory for boat production," Kendal explained. "Had to sell everything at a loss, and he blamed Ross. But I don't believe King had anything to do with the sabotage. He didn't have the sense. The dirty work was all Burch's."

"His name isn't Burch, incidently," Fowler said. "It's von Bernstorff."

"Not that it matters," Kendal added. "A rogue by any other name would smell—period."

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FURTHER EXPLOITS OF DAN FOWLER, ACE OF THE F.B.I.

*in*

# ONE THOUSAND SUSPECTS

By

## NORMAN A. DANIELS

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•

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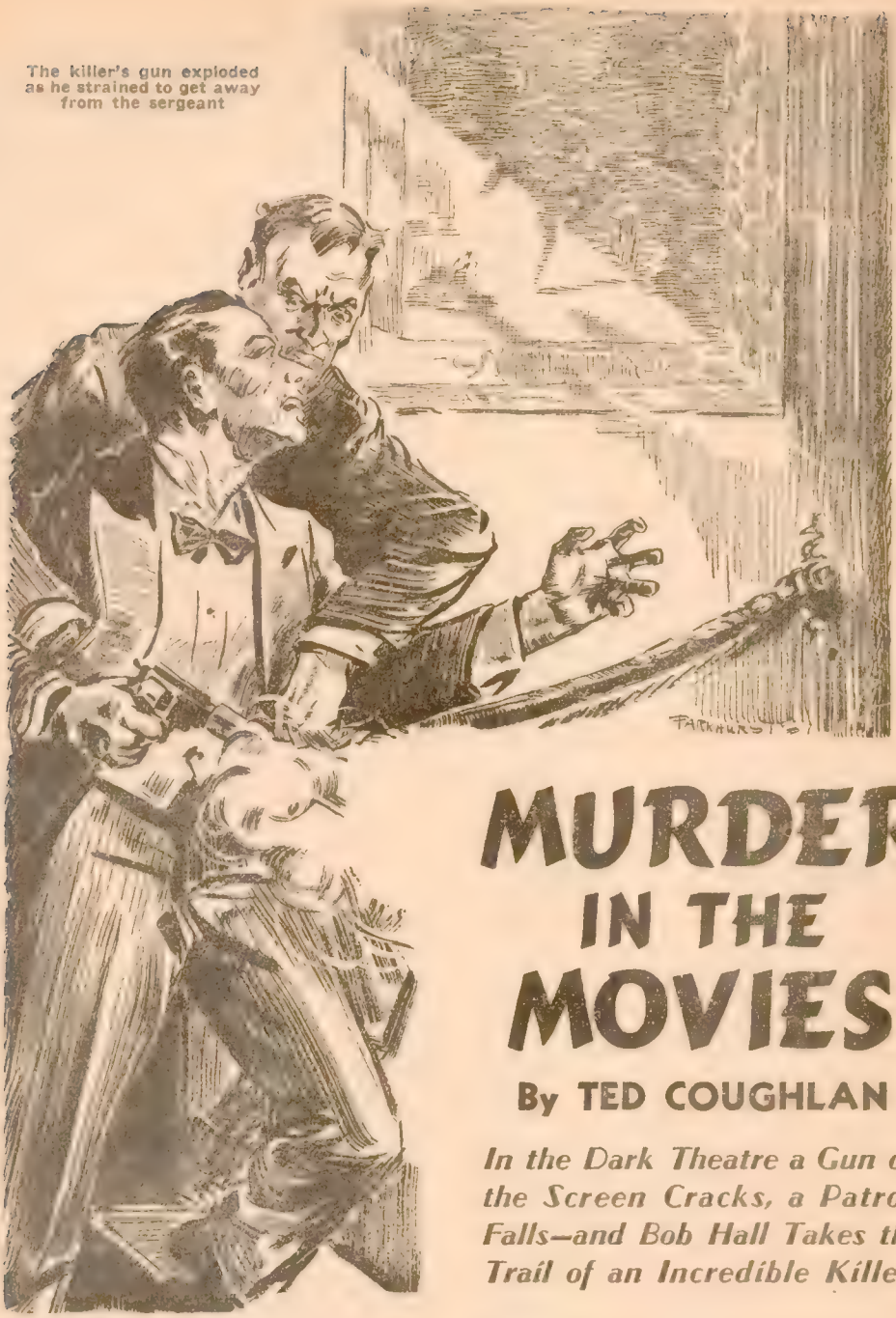

The killer's gun exploded as he strained to get away from the sergeant

# MURDER IN THE MOVIES

## By TED COUGHLAN

*In the Dark Theatre a Gun on the Screen Cracks, a Patron Falls—and Bob Hall Takes the Trail of an Incredible Killer!*

BOB HALL was so absorbed in following the fast action on the movie screen that for a while he nearly forgot certain deplorable facts—one of which was the uncomfortable knowledge that he had been fired from his job as reporter on "The Miami Standard."

It was hardly noon yet and the Princess Theatre had just opened for the matinee run. Only a sprinkling of patrons dotted the darkened auditorium, one here, another there, a few up in the balcony. Hall rubbed absently at the dollar-sized bald spot on the back of his head, in a characteristic gesture, and kept his alert blue eyes glued to the screen.

Half way through the film he decided he was too close to the screen for best vision and he got up, moved back several rows in the nearly empty theatre and lowered his well-upholstered body into another seat.

The shots on the screen came suddenly and

without warning. There had been no build-up. The villain of the piece just abruptly decided on a resort to arms and went for his gat. It spat fire and noise and a girl somewhere in the rear of the auditorium let out a startled squeal and then laughed audibly to cover her confusion.

The villain's target, the fellow on the screen, escaped injury, stayed on his feet—which seemed strange, because the flame from that lethal weapon had lanced out so convincingly that an imaginative man like Hall could almost feel the shock of the bullet.

Perhaps the lone man sitting several rows ahead of Hall had even more imagination, for now the edge of Hall's vision caught sight of him slumping from his seat to the floor.

Instantly the ex-reporter's eyes and attention focused on the place where the man had been sitting. It was weird, to say the least—almost as though the slug from that gun on the screen had nipped past its intended victim to reach right out into the auditorium after another.

Hall got up. He was quiet about it, for he didn't want to start a panic. Even a few people could make a big commotion, once they got started. He edged in from the aisle and sat down in the seat next to the victim. His eyes, accustomed now to the dark, took in the heavy form wedged there between the seats, huddled and still on the carpeted floor.

THE man was humped over, on his knees, almost in a position of prayer. His head was drooped on his outflung arms, and in the faint glow from the screen Hall could see blood at the base of the skull. The position of the wound left no doubt at all that the victim was dead.

As a newspaper man and police reporter, Hall had seen death in many forms, become almost immune to scenes of violence. But somehow this got him for a moment. Maybe it was the liquor he had had the night before—the too-much liquor that had gotten him a curt "You're fired, Hall," from the city editor that morning.

Anyway, he stared down at that huddled form with the ugly smear of red on the heavy neck, and his stomach twisted inside him. No one else seemed to have noticed. The picture went on, the sound track spilling its continuing dialogue into the now slowly filling auditorium.

Something about the man at his feet registered a note of familiarity, rang a bell in his mind, but he couldn't at the moment say just what it was. What he did know was that this was cold-blooded murder, and it might have come from anywhere, from any direction. He felt a chill ripple up his spine as he let his eyes turn slowly here and there, seeking movement that might have special significance. There was nothing.

Hall walked down the aisle, found a uniformed usher standing with arms folded, beside the rear rail of the auditorium.

"Where is Mr. Barnes?" he asked.

Barnes was the manager. Hall knew him, had been often in the theatre on his newspaper man's pass.

"I think he's—there he is now, sir." The boy jerked a finger at a tall, slender man approaching from the direction of the theatre office.

Hall stopped him. "Oh, Barnes."

"Yes? Oh, hello, Hall. What's bothering you?"

Hall shoved a thumb in the direction of the body.

"Little matter of a murder, it would seem."

"A—murder?"

The theatre man appeared to be thoroughly unnerved, and his voice came in a croak.

"Up there, about the fifteenth row. Somebody shot him during the shooting on the screen. Better call the police. Also, don't let anyone in or out." He turned to the usher.

"Did you see anyone leave in the last minute or two?"

"No, I didn't, Mr. Hall." The usher's eyes were wide. "What—who?"

Barnes, white as a ghost, got hold of himself with a visible effort and went into action.

"The feature's nearly over," he said. "If we turn the lights up—"

"Don't turn the lights up," Hall snapped. "Run a short comedy—a news reel—anything, until the police get here and take charge. We don't want anyone running out on us, and we have no authority to hold them."

Barnes phoned the projection room, gave quick orders, then hurried to the ticket window.

"Don't sell any more admissions, Marge, until you have further orders." Then he turned to two ushers standing near. "Frankie, you and Charles close the doors, and see that they stay closed, except for the police."

Barnes hurried to the office, dialed the police station number, gave his information and hung up. Then he lighted a cigarette, inhaled a deep drag and let it out nervously.

"Whew," he breathed. "This is terrible, Hall."

"Yeah," Bob Hall said. He lighted a cigarette, too, turned it slowly in his fingers, thinking. "If you don't mind," he continued, "I'll do a spot of phoning, myself."

"Help yourself, man," the manager said, and went out, smoke trailing agitatedly over the smooth shoulder of his tuxedo coat.

Hall released smoke between his teeth, blue eyes narrowed as he surveyed the phone. He scrubbed at that bald spot on the back of his head with a big, blunt-fingered hand.

SUDDENLY, in the silence of the empty room, he heard the relentless hammers of his hangover beating a dirge on the inside of his skull. For a little while, watching the

picture, he had forgotten the night before, even forgotten Pete Parker's harsh "You're fired!"

"Fired," he muttered now, half aloud. "Hmmm. Could be. Or maybe not. We'll see."

He picked up the phone, dialed swiftly. When he had the raspy voice of the cadaverous city editor on the other end of the wire, he began to parley.

"Hall," he drawled. "Bob Hall—with a story."

The city editor informed him, in verbal blueprint, just where he could go with his story.

Hall grinned. "Okay—but you'll be so-o-orry. G'bye, ostrich."

"Hey, wait a minute, you overfed ape. What you got?"

"Small item of a murder. Bob Hall, witness to a fatal shooting in a gin mill and chief witness for the prosecution in said shootin' affair, now comin' before the courts—walks into a movie palace and sees a gent gunned down by a slug from the screen. Spectacular, and it's—"

"You have the wrong number," interrupted the raspy voice. "This is the Miami Standard, not the home for inebriates."

Hall crushed out his cigarette in the ashtray with a vehement gesture, and now he was not smiling.

"Look, Parker," he said. "I was within twenty feet of our friend John Waycross, when the gunman got him at the Green Eagle bar six months ago. That was an inside story, because Waycross was rich and important, and I was on the spot to give you a fast tip on it, and an exclusive story.

"On the strength of that—remember?—you gave this here wandering newshound a job on your crummy sheet, and—"

"And because you were due up today to testify for the D. A. in that Waycross thing, I gave you last evening and today off—and you go right down to the Green Eagle and get tanked to the snoot."

"Reliving the event, my friend, the better to tell the twelve good men and true all the gruesome details of how David Jordan shot John Waycross. Stop, look and listen, chief. This is the payoff. Murder must like the cut of my jib, because just now in the Princess Theatre I was closer to another victim than I was to Waycross."

"Murder—in the movies?" Hall heard the note of interest and excitement in Parker's voice.

"Yeah. And you could be in on the ground floor if you liked to play along with a guy and wouldn't go on an Anti-Saloon League rampage over a couple of glasses of beer."

A snort was the only answer for a moment.

"Hall, you are a staff writer for the Miami Standard. You even rate a byline. Now give us a flash on this thing, for a makeover, if it sounds good. And then you can go to work on it. Hold the wire. I'll turn you over to rewrite."

When Hall returned to the foyer, the police were arriving, led by burly Ed Davis, lieutenant of the Homicide Squad. Under Davis' orders, the picture stopped, the lights went up, and the hundred or so of patrons were gathered under guard in the foyer.

Hall went, with Davis and two patrolmen, to where the body lay. The newspaper man was still trying to put his finger on what it was about the fellow that seemed familiar.

Davis edged his big figure between the seats and turned his flash on the dead man. He chewed thoughtfully on a wad of gum for a few moments, then turned to Hall.

"You saw what happened?"

"I did." Hall briefly told him all the facts he knew.

"He was facing the screen, of course?"

Hall nodded. "Guess so. Must have been."

"Then he was shot from the auditorium, not the stage," said Davis. "Slug hit him in the back of the head. But somebody would have seen or heard a revolver shot in the open here."

"Silencer, maybe," suggested the reporter.

"Probably. And at least a hundred people here, and darned near any one of 'em could've done it."

LIEUTENANT DAVIS knuckled his stubbly chin with a sound like sandpaper and looked exasperated.

"Half of 'em are kids," he went on. "We can let them go. Sergeant Holcomb, attend to it. Barnes, did you see anything?"

Barnes, still nervous and agitated, shook his head.

"I had just stepped into my office when the shots were fired on the screen."

The fingerprint men came, and the photographers, and the medical examiner. They got the body out where the M. E. could examine it, and Hall wondered again what it was about the man that seemed familiar.

The victim's registration card revealed little. He was Arthur Madden, aged thirty. His service classification was 4F, his occupation none and he had no next of kin.

Davis showed the card to Hall.

"That's a big help," he growled. "He lived in the Palatial Hotel, a flop house. A drifter and a bum. Why would anybody want to kill the guy?"

"Whoever did it must have known just when those shots were going to be fired, to tie in his own with them," Hall said.

"So?" Davis looked curious.

"So he—or she—must have seen the picture before."

Davis snapped his fingers.

"That's a fact. How long's that film been running, Barnes?"

"Three days," Barnes said. "We might ask Marge if she remembers any repeaters in this group we're holding. She has a photographic memory for faces."

Marge knew none of them. Nor did their

questioning of the impatient, resentful men and women of the waiting group net anything until each was asked to look at the dead man. Hall, Davis and the others watched reactions carefully as one after another entered the manager's office and looked at the body lying on a table there.

One of the men, a thin, badly dressed young fellow with shifty eyes and yellowish-brown cigarette stains on his fingers showed such agitation that Davis turned a barrage of questions loose at him.

"Sure I knew him," the thin man admitted, at last. "In New York. Him and me roomed together for a while. But I lost track of him a year ago."

"Until you caught up with him again here in Miami, huh?" Davis snapped. "All right, Martinson, come clean. Why did you shoot him?"

"Flatfoot, you're full of prunes. I never even knew he was here until just now."

That was all they could get out of Martinson, but the little fellow was hauled off to the police station, savagely protesting, for further questioning.

Hall phoned the office of "The Standard," and got Parker on the line.

"Come in and write what you've got," Parker said. "And it better be good!"

Hall glanced at his wrist watch.

"Look, Pete, let me give the dope to the rewrite desk. I'm due at the courthouse to testify in that Waycross case. Star witness, you know, all that kind of rot."

"The trial has been postponed for a week," Parker said. "Smith just phoned us from the courthouse news room. So come on in and hammer out your stuff."

Hall did.

"What's your angle on it?" Parker said when the reporter laid his copy on the city editor's desk.

"Martinson, probably." Hall hooked one leg over the corner of the desk and lighted a cigarette. "But so far there seems no motivation. As to the timing of the shot—and it must have come right pat with the shot in the picture—the fellow could have seen the film in some other town or other theatre."

"It took a sharpshooter to nail a man in the half dark like that," Parker commented. "Have you thought of that?"

"Jeepers, yes. Funny thing, though. Something about Madden—the dead man—that's mighty familiar, something that would, maybe, give us a line to work on. Can't think of it yet, but I'll get it. Tonight I'm having a look at Madden's room at the Palatial, if I can get in. Davis will have been there with his sleuths, but I might dig up a lead they've overlooked. By the way, how's Jordan making out, down in jail? Still insisting he's innocent?"

PARKER snorted. "He tells it to everyone who passes in the corridor, Smith says. Declares he never killed Waycross, wasn't within miles of the Green Eagle, that night."

Hall shook his head, his lips suddenly grim.

"I couldn't have mistaken him," he said. "I was at the bar and I had only a quick glimpse of him when he opened the side door, but that long nose, and the scar on his cheek. And he did admit to the D. A. that he figured Waycross flimflammed him in that realty deal. Heck, it's open and shut, and I'll so testify, much as I hate to point the finger of guilt at any man."

The Palatial Hotel was a dump, a shoddy place indeed! But the manager acted as if he were running the Ritz, and he wasn't going to let Bob Hall see Madden's room.

"The police were here, poking their noses into everything, ruining my business," he whined. "Now you come. How do I know you won't walk off with something?"

"I probably will," Hall snapped. "Unless they walk off with me first." He scratched his chest significantly.

"Hey, you can't talk to me like that!"

"Look, fella, how would you like to argue with the sanitary authorities?"

The man gulped and his eyes rolled.

"Well, if you hafta see that room, then I guess you hafta. Here's a key. Go on up."

Hall walked to the third floor and had a look at the dog kennel that the Palatial called a room. A sagging bed, a broken, straight-backed chair, a chipped bureau that leaned wearily against the mildewed wall because one hind leg was missing. Hall pulled down the tattered window shade, and, by the light of the single bulb swinging on its cord from the ceiling, inspected the one-time living quarters of Arthur Madden.

The man's belongings had all been removed by the police. Hall found nothing, not a shred of anything that would help to solve the mystery. And it was a mystery why anyone would go to all that trouble to shoot down so obscure and insignificant an individual as this Madden.

Hall poked the sodden mattress with a disgusted finger. Then the smell of the place got him, and he turned to the door, ready to flee this unsavory joint.

Opening the door, he stepped into the narrow, dimly lighted hallway—and a bullet skimmed past his ear with a thin, eerie sound that ended in an audible spat as it hit the wall at the far end of the corridor.

As he flung his big body to one side, and down, he caught a glimpse of a figure on the fire escape, silhouetted against the city lights outside. The window opening onto that fire escape was open, and the figure was moving away from it, fast. Feet drummed on the iron ladder, leading down to the street.

Hall rushed to the window, saw the dark shape that had nearly reached the ground level, in the alley. He started to follow, then changed his mind and tore for the inside stairway, taking the flights three steps at a

time. But when he got to the alley entrance, his quarry had disappeared.

"We were right about the silencer," he told Davis later at the police station. "Nothing but a pop from that gun when he fired through the window at me."

Davis nodded, chewed on a cigar.

"Either Martinson is in the clear, or else he is working in cahoots with someone," Davis said. "He's behind bars, so it's a cinch he isn't the gent who tried to pot you, just now."

"There's got to be something important in that room," Hall said. "Or else they think I have information that's dangerous, something learned earlier in the day."

"The manager of the Palatial," Davis suggested. "Who else knew you were there?"

"Any number of people could have seen me heading for the joint," Hall said, and Davis nodded in baffled agreement.

"And the silencer," went on Hall. "You don't just pick up one of those things at the dime store when you want it. The bird that shot at me was the same fellow who killed Madden, probably."

"Got any ideas?" asked Davis, staring at the reporter.

Hall rubbed thoughtfully at that bald spot on the back of his head, and continued:

"The Palatial manager wasn't in the theatre when the shooting occurred. Martinson was. But Martinson wasn't the fellow on the fire escape just now. He—uhhh—"

HALL'S voice trailed off. Davis moved his cigar over to the other side of his mouth and regarded the reporter. He was puzzled.

"What's the matter with you, Hall? See a ghost?"

Hall inhaled a big drag of cigarette smoke, let it out in a nervous gust, and spoke through the blue cloud.

"I just got an idea."

Davis laughed. "Better steer clear of ideas if they hit you like that, man. You're absolutely green around the gills."

But Hall was already halfway out the door, and he flung his reply over his shoulder.

"I'm going to the theatre. Follow me in five minutes."

Then he was out, hurrying down the street. A glance at his wrist watch showed the time. It was ten-twenty. He knew that Barnes usually went out for a snack and a breathing spell between ten and ten-thirty P.M. If he was following that custom tonight, Hall might play in luck. If not—the reporter's eyes narrowed with determination as he hastened on his way—he'd just have to bull it through.

Barnes was out when he reached the theatre.

"Be back soon, Mr. Hall," the usher said.

"Okay, I'll wait in his office," Hall said with the familiarity of long association.

The office was usually left open when Barnes went out for a few minutes. But tonight it was locked. Hall stood with his hand on the knob, his blue eyes glinting. The locked door almost confirmed his suspicions.

Unobtrusively he strolled to the sidewalk, and, when opportunity offered, slid into the alley between the theatre and the store next to it. The office window opened on that alley.

The window was not locked, and Hall had it open and, for all his bulk, was over the sill in a jiffy. A shaded lamp on a bronze base lighted the polished surface of the desk, leaving the remainder of the elegantly furnished room in dimness.

The desk was locked, but Hall had once, in his eventful career, been a private detective, and there were times too when a newspaper man needed entry to locked spots. So he always carried a bit of wire in his pocket, and the gadget did a neat, quick job this time, as usual.

The reporter went through that desk with an eye and ear cocked toward the locked door of the office. If Barnes caught him there, and the desk contained nothing of consequence, it would be bad business. He would be out of a job again, maybe in jail. He liked Miami, wanted to stay, but not on-the-inside-looking-out.

The second drawer on the right yielded a packet of old letters which caused him to curse softly with satisfaction. He laid them aside, went on.

Beneath a layer of papers and dust cloths in the bottom drawer he found—a silencer! Not the gun to which it had been attached, only the silencer.

It was enough.

Then the key turned softly in the lock of the office door. The sound brought the newspaper man to his feet as though he had been jerked up by the hair. He turned toward the open window, but so swiftly did the door open, so suddenly did Barnes appear there with a leveled gun, that Hall knew his chances of escaping were nil.

The black bore of the heavy revolver held Hall's gaze for a fascinated moment, then he raised his eyes and met the cold stare of the slim young theatre manager behind the leveled weapon.

"Shot in the act of robbery." Barnes spoke softly. "Too bad, Hall."

The muzzle of the gun moved slightly, centered on the reporter's heart. Hall saw death coming and flung himself at the window, his flesh crawling with anticipation of the bullet's impact.

Over his shoulder, in action which was like the confused jiggle of movement on the screen when the film breaks, he saw Lieutenant Davis lunge through the door and grab Barnes from behind, jerking him backward into the foyer. He was too late to halt the shot, and the roar of the heavy weapon in the confined space slapped at the eardrums.

But the slug went wild, and in moments Barnes was disarmed and handcuffed.

TWO patrolmen hurried in, and Davis ordered the door shut and locked against curious theatre patrons who had been attracted by the shot. The night was not warm, but Bob Hall felt sweat on his shoulderblades as he turned to the wild-eyed prisoner.

"You nearly put it over, feller, but three times and out. Last time you whiffed it. Get out of the batter's box, Jordan."

Davis' jaw dropped. He stared in amazement.

"Did you say—Jordan?"

"James Barnes Jordan. Letters there in the desk to prove it."

"Brother of David Jordan, huh?"

"Cousin," the prisoner said sullenly. "It was worth five thousand dollars to Dave to have somebody shut your mouth, Hall. He had—has—plenty. Never mind how he got it. I'll talk—sure I'll talk. If it hadn't been for him I wouldn't be in this spot right now."

Later, in Davis' office at the station, Hall and the lieutenant talked it over.

"So Madden took the slug meant for you," Davis ruminated. "But I still don't see how you figured it out that Barnes—Jordan, rather—was our man."

"I thought of Barnes as soon as I realized someone had tried to get me and not Madden. Because I figured then that it must tie up with the Jordan trial, and then I remembered that at the coroner's inquest and the preliminary hearing I had seen Barnes. He was always around. He was even haunting the hallways while the grand jury deliberated. Too much Barnes to be a happenstance."

"Yeah, but how did you know it was you they were after and not Madden, there in the theatre?"

Hall, who had been caressing his bald spot with the palm of his hand, turned his head.

"See that spot?"

"Yeah. But—what's that got to do with it?"

"Seemed queer, didn't it, that anyone could target a slug in a half dark theatre the way Barnes—Jordan—did. He got Madden in the neck, a miss of only a few inches."

"Yeah."

"Quit saying 'yeah,' and listen. When I went into the theatre I sat down about three rows in front of Madden. But I was too close to the screen, and I moved to about five rows behind him. In that seat ahead of him, the edge of the beam from the projector up behind the balcony must have highlighted my polished bald spot and made it shine like a dollar-sized bullseye. When I moved back, I was out of the light, partly under the balcony."

"Clear enough, so far."

"Well, you remember I said there was something about Madden that seemed important but that I couldn't quite define? Something that kept evading me?"

"Yeah."

"I was watching the action on the screen, of course, during that picture, but after I moved behind Madden I must have noticed subconsciously how the edge of that projector beam picked him up. Because you see, my friend, Madden had a bald spot exactly like mine."

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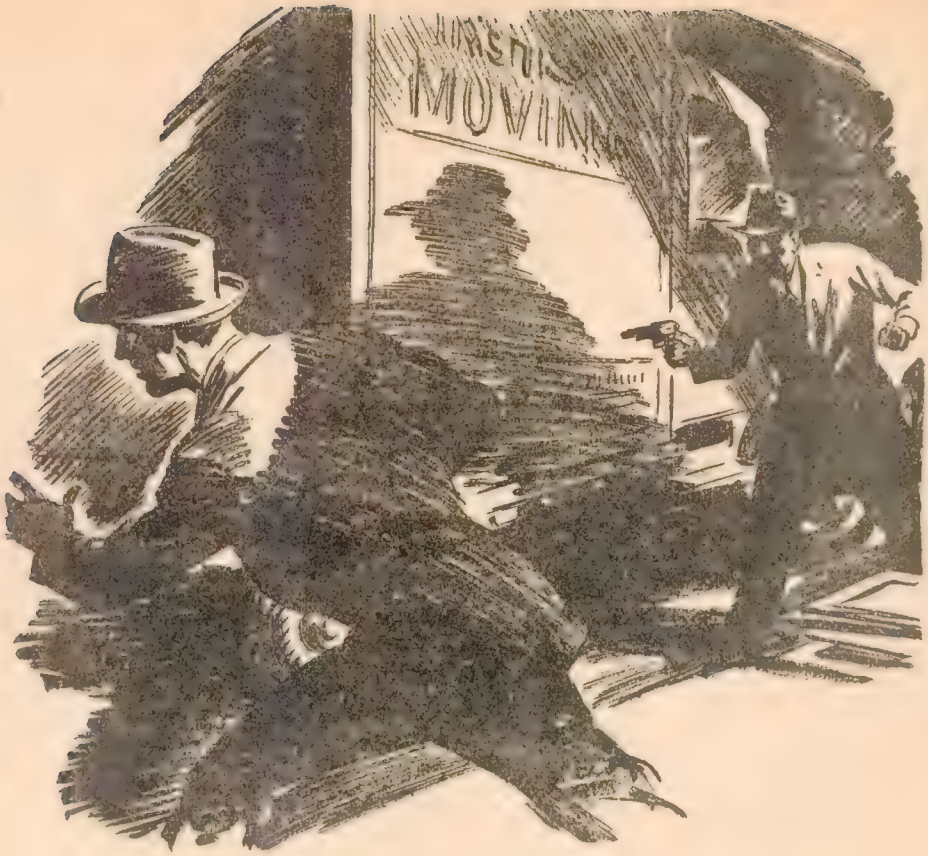



Like an angry hornet, the bullet droned past the Baron's ear

# THE BARON MAKES A PHOTO FINISH

## By CURTISS T. GARDNER

*Bill Tolliver, Insurance Investigator, Comes Up Against Some Mighty High-Class Conniving Before He Finally Unearths a Girl's Legacy!*

THE redhead at the switchboard disentangled her phone jacks and turned back to Bill "Baron Munchausen" Tolliver, who was leaning toward her across the railing near the entrance to the office of the Imperial Casualty Company.

"So some of us girls are pooling our money on the races at Pimlico tomorrow," she said. "We thought maybe you could give us a hot tip, Baron."

"Tip!" the Baron echoed. "Say! I have a mathematically exact system. When they were running at Tropical Park I hit the winner on the nose each race for ten days in succession. It's a scientific formula."

A heavy gray-clad figure appeared in the doorway of a glassed-in space on the far side of the broad general office.

"Tolliver!" a gruff voice bellowed. "I want you!"

The Baron glanced at the wall clock which stood five minutes before quitting time. He muttered something.

"Why, Baron!" the redhead at the switchboard exclaimed.

A deep scowl creased the Baron's small sharp features as he barged into the private office of Ellis Mehary, District Claims Manager of the Imperial Casualty Insurance Company. It smoothed magically, to be replaced

by an ingratiating smile as the Baron pulled up short just inside the door.

It was the girl seated beside Mehary's big walnut desk who caused the rapid change. A demure little thing with wide, lustrous amber eyes and soft chestnut hair. The smile on her face was warm, her eyes friendly as they rested on the Baron.

"This is Miss Laura Billings, Tolliver," said Mehary in the calm, unruffled tone he reserved for policy holders. "We have a Fine Arts Floater policy on a collection of race horse pictures which belonged to her father. She reports that one of these pictures has been stolen."

The girl nodded. "Last week someone stole ten prints. They're mounted ten prints to the frame. And last night whoever it was tried to take another set. Only last night I happened to be home. I'd gone to bed quite early on account of a bad headache. A noise, like something falling in the living room, wakened me. I went to investigate and in the dark someone knocked me down. I screamed and the burglar ran out the back of the house."

"Why didn't you report the loss of the first picture at once?" the Baron asked, his black eyes intent.

The girl hesitated. "I just didn't think of it," she admitted. "The pictures have more of a sentimental than a money value to me. They were Father's pride and joy, and since that automobile accident—since Father was killed—" She faltered, then her chin came up and she went on. "This morning Mort Thomas, he's my cousin, reminded me of the insurance and suggested that I ought to come by your office."

"Quite right, Miss Billings," Mehary said. "We always want to pay our legitimate claims. But I called Mr. Tolliver to hear what you had to say because I want him to investigate and recover your picture, if possible."

The Baron grunted.

"How'd you know the burglar went out the back of the house, Miss Billings, if it was dark?" he asked suddenly.

"Because Mr. and Mrs. Howard rang the doorbell only a moment later," the girl explained. "And they hadn't seen anybody."

"Who're the Howards?"

"The Belden Howards. He has a position with the Jockey Club—one of their auditors. The Howards were Father's friends."

"Was anyone else around?"

"Yes. Mort's been staying at my house. Trying to straighten out Father's affairs for me. Mort had been reading in his room. He heard me scream and came into the living room right away. But all we found when we looked around was one of Father's pictures on the floor with the glass and the frame broken. Apparently nothing else had been touched. It puzzles me, and scares me, too."

"What would you consider a fair settlement for the one that was stolen, Miss Billings?" Mehary said casually.

The girl seemed uncertain. "Mr. Tomara offered me five thousand dollars for the whole collection. Of course, the prints are more valuable as a collection than they would be individually. But still—"

SHE was interrupted as the office door was opened unceremoniously. The young man who strode in would have been handsome except for lines of obstinacy around a loose-lipped, weak mouth. He wore smartly tailored English tweeds and an expression of habitual petulance. The Baron's eyes were drawn at once to his bandaged left hand.

"Ready to go, Laura?" the young man asked, nodding slightly to Mehary and the Baron.

"Hello, Mort," Laura said, smiling. "This is Mr. Tolliver. He's going to try to find my picture."

Young Thomas ignored the Baron's outstretched hand.

"Get in touch with Frank Mullins then," he told him curtly. "I've just hired Mullins to protect Laura and guard the rest of the collection."

The Baron's black eyes were cold as agates. "Cut your hand, Mr. Thomas?" he asked.

Thomas' eyes dropped involuntarily to his bandaged hands.

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Just wondered if perhaps you'd cut it on broken picture glass?"

Thomas gave the Baron a frigid stare. "It so happens I cut it on the broken plate of a wall switch," he said precisely. "But what, please, has that got to do with paying off on your insurance claim?"

The Baron shrugged. "Maybe a lot. We require a proof of loss, you know, before handing out any dough."

"Is that an insinuation?" Thomas demanded. "I don't think I like your attitude, Tolliver! You'd better see Mullins if you're going to go through a lot of technicalities. Mullins is one of the best detectives in town."

"In a pig's eye he is," the Baron said rudely. "That guy'd have a tough time finding George Washington's picture on a dollar bill."

"I'm afraid," the girl broke in quickly, "we've started a profitless argument. You know where to reach me, Mr. Mehary. I'll expect you to honor my claim promptly."

Ignoring the Baron entirely, she swept from the private office, followed by Thomas.

Mehary turned on the Baron, glowering.

"A fine diplomatic way to deal with policy holders!" he accused. "If you've lost us that

account I'll have your hide stuffed and mounted."

The Baron grinned. "I don't see why the underwriting department ever wrote the account in the first place. Didn't you hear the girl mention Tomara? Don't you know who that girl Laura is? She's the torch singer at Tomara's Club Romaine. I've seen her there. Sure, she's a cute little number all right and I could go for her myself. But anyone hooked up with that chiseling sharpshooter, Tomara, must be crooked as a swamp cypress."

Mehary brought the flat of his hand down on the desk top with a crash.

"Listen, gravy-brain! Before you blow through your whale spout you'd better learn a few facts. The girl may sing at Tomara's place but she's the daughter of "Long Shot" John Billings. The big shot race horse owner who died last month. Billings must have been worth a million or more. That girl's a deb!"

"I read the papers, too," the Baron said coolly. "Like all gamblers, Billings died broke. It's obvious to me that little Laura and her fancy-pants cousin are out after some ready cash—at the expense of Imperial Casualty. They're finagling the pictures to collect insurance. Or else Thomas is doing it by himself to build up the estate so he'll get more when he marries the girl."

Mehary drew in his breath and swelled like a bullfrog.

"The boys call you Baron Munchausen on account of your wild yarns," he growled. "But don't try your imagination on me. I want facts, not moonshine. Now get out there and see if you can counteract the bad impression you've given those people."

The Baron was talking to himself as he went down in the elevator.

"Always it comes at quitting time! Never fails! Policy holders never think about their insurance except after four in the afternoons or near noon Saturday."

In the lobby he met "Baldy" Leigh and two other men from the office staff.

"Come on, let's eat," the Baron suggested. "Maybe we're slaves of the dear old Imperial Casualty and have to work twenty-five hours a day. But we don't have to do it on empty stomachs as long as the old swindle sheet holds out."

They ate at the Live-and-Let-Live Lunchroom. It was dusk when the Baron turned his company puddle jumper into the short driveway of the Billings' place.

A CAR whipped out and tore past him. In the dim light the Baron caught a fleeting glimpse of the driver. No mistaking the fat, ugly features. Pete Tomara, owner of the Club Romaine.

"Now what the blue blazes would he be doing out here?" the Baron muttered to himself. And immediately answering his own question, he said, "Helping raise the ante on those pictures, I'll bet."

There were lights inside the trim white bungalow, but no one answered the Baron's ring. After three attempts he tried the door, found it unlatched, and went in.

From the entrance hall he could see the whole living room. There wasn't a living soul in it. Young Mort Thomas was there, but he wasn't living any more.

The Baron was in the room with a single bound. He stooped quickly. But it was useless. The knife buried in Mort Thomas must have brought death instantaneously.

The Baron was still bending over the body when someone came into the room behind him. The Baron whirled, then relaxed. He recognized Hogan of the Homicide Squad. With the city dick were two cops in uniform, who stared at the dead man in open-mouthed surprise.

"Well, well if it ain't my old friend the insurance man," Hogan said, bobbing his shaggy head with ponderous sarcasm. "And now you've got a swell chance to use that great imagination in figuring yourself an alibi. I suppose you just landed by parachute."

The Baron straightened. "Don't be a fool, Hogan. I walked in not more than a minute ago and found—this. How'd you happen to come here?"

"One of the neighbors phoned," Hogan said. "Said they heard a scream like someone getting killed. It's a good thing I beat it out here fast. In time to get you red-handed."

At just this moment a heavy-set man, who wore a derby and looked exactly like the movie version of a private detective, appeared in the doorway. He couldn't see the dead man because Hogan's wide bulk blocked his view.

"What's this—a convention?" he said gruffly. "I'm in charge of this dump. What are you guys doing?"

"We're playing 'who-dun-it', Mullins," the Baron said softly. "Want to join us?"

"Listen, you," Mullins said, advancing into the room truculently. "Nobody's cutting in on my—" He broke off suddenly as his eyes snagged the motionless form on the rug. His mouth fell open, revealing a row of gold teeth. "Heh! What—"

"Yeah! What? I'll bet ten gallons of gas that you know the answer."

Mullins blinked, took a quick step backward.

"I don't know nothin'," he protested feebly. "Might have been the Billings dame that did it. She and this Thomas guy didn't get along."

"You mean they had a fight?" It was Hogan who spoke.

"Naw," Mullins corrected. "She's one of them wise babies."

"What's going on here?" asked a new voice from the doorway. Everybody swung around and stared.

A small, but broad-shouldered man of middle age stepped into the room. Neatly dressed, he wore a pince-nez attached to a black ribbon. He looked like a prosperous professional man.

The Baron looked at Hogan and grinned.

"Maybe Mullins was right about it's being a convention," he said. "We'd better order up a keg of beer." Then turning on the latest arrival, he said, "You're Howard, I'll bet."

Howard nodded. "I'm looking for Miss Billings," he said. "Where is she? She phoned my wife this afternoon and said she was coming over to spend the night with us. But she hasn't showed up, so—"

His eyes popped as they came to rest on the murdered man. He recoiled, his face contracting into a horrified grimace.

"It's Mort Thomas!" he gasped. "What—how did this happen?"

Suddenly the phone rang. Hogan stepped over and plucked off the receiver.

"Huh? Who? Yeah, he's here."

The Homicide man handed the phone to Howard.

"For you. A dame."

Howard reached for the phone.

"Oh, hello, Laura," he said. "I was wondering where you were." He listened for a moment, a bewildered expression on his face. Finally he said, "But did you know Mort Thomas has been found dead—murdered? You might be suspected . . . hello—hello!"

HE JIGGLED the hook, then started to put the receiver down.

Hogan sprang forward. "Don't hang up! I want to talk to that dame."

Howard finished pronging the instrument. "She hung up on me."

"What did she say?" demanded Hogan. "Where is she?"

"She asked me to arrange closing up this house for her. Said something had happened that makes it necessary for her to go out of town." Howard shook his head, puzzled. "Said she'd make arrangements to send for her things later."

"See!" Mullins spoke up. "It's plain as the nose on your face. The gal knocks off her cousin and then lams."

"Never mind my nose," Hogan cut in. "Maybe it's plain, but I can smell with it fine. And I say your theory smells, Mullins. I'm arresting Tolliver for murder. I caught the guy still bending over his victim."

"Wait a minute!" the Baron implored. "Don't go off half-cocked, Hogan. You'll get me in even worse with Mehary. There's a lot behind this. Where was Miss Billings, Howard?"

"She didn't say," Howard replied. "Just hung up when I told her about Mort Thomas."

Hogan took the Baron roughly by the arm.

"Come on, wise guy. You aren't going to talk yourself out of this in a hurry."

The Baron followed Hogan toward the door. Suddenly he swung his right leg sideward. Hogan stumbled over it. The Baron raised both hands instantaneously, put them on Hogan's shoulder and shoved violently. Hogan sprawled squarely into the other two cops and they all went down on the floor together.

The Baron didn't wait to see what happened after that. He sent his flivver roaring out the driveway, took the corner on two wheels. . . .

That night the Baron slept in an obscure uptown hotel. He spent the next day mainly in a dark movie house.

The morning papers showed that the heat was on for him, strong enough to melt an iceberg. Hogan had the whole police force on the qui vive. Mehary was quoted as fearing that the Baron's mind had given way.

After reading the remarks of his District Claims Manager, the Baron muttered angrily and hurled the paper the length of the room.

"If I hide out any longer, I'm cooked," the Baron mumbled. "The guy who killed Mort Thomas might have left some clue. Hogan won't get it, of course. And it'll be stone cold before long. Maybe if I can get a look at Laura Billings' pictures and study the lay of the land I can get something to go ahead on."

It was late in the afternoon when he ventured out. He headed straight for the Billings' home. First thing he saw when he drove into that block was a big moving van. Men were bringing furniture out of Laura's house.

"And Hogan won't be far away," the Baron thought even before his sharp black eyes had spotted the police car parked a little ahead of him along the street.

The Baron tooled his company car to the curb. With his hat tilted to obscure his face, a newspaper held in front of him, he waited until the van had finished loading and pulled away.

When the police car had picked up the van's trail, he followed at a respectful distance.

The van went directly to the huge downtown terminal of the Atlas Transportation Company where it turned in and parked.

The Baron stayed in his car until Hogan's man had left the garage. Then he went in. The manager was busy on the loading platform. He cut the Baron's question short.

"I just got through chinning with another guy about that truckload of stuff for Miss Billings. There wasn't any destination given. Miss Billings left word she'd call us later and say where she wanted it delivered."

The Baron thanked the manager and started out. Nearing the door, he gave a last glance at the loaded van. Hanging on the rear was a package which had been labeled "Broken." He shot a quick glance around, then turned and slid back of several vans until he came to the rear of the one he wanted.

He slipped loose the ropes holding the package and carried it behind one of the empty vans.

He had been right. It was the picture which had been broken the night of the second robbery at the Billings' house.

THE BARON carefully studied each of the ten photographs mounted under the broken glass. They were scarcely the sort of things to attract a burglar. Certainly nothing which could lead to murder. Only a racing fan would want the pictures at all. There was a series of dates and autographs on each horse's picture and some extremely queer markings.

The Baron got a thrill for a moment as he saw them. He recalled the story Baldy Leigh had told him, how Billings had a really deadly system of winning on long shots. Maybe these odd signs were the system.

He drew the mounting out, because the broken glass hid part of the writing. As he did, the pictures slid loose. He picked one up, turned it over and whistled soundlessly.

For pasted to the back was a fifty-dollar mutuel ticket!

The Baron hastily examined the others. And on each was a ticket for the same amount.

For a moment, the Baron figured they represented Billings' losings, but his intuition told him they didn't. No real gambler saves losers.

He whipped an envelope and a pencil from his pocket, rapidly jotted down the numbers and dates of the ten tickets. Then he studied the hieroglyphics and wound up making a rude noise with his lips. Finally, he rewrapped the picture and replaced it under the ropes.

From the garage he headed toward the Imperial Casualty office. The downtown streets were clear. He parked in front of the office building. He was opening the door to get out when a big man with a gun slid into the opposite side of the car.

The man, swarthy and vicious-looking, nudged the Baron in the ribs with his revolver.

"Keep driving, pal," he said, "and don't stop till I tell you."

The Baron drove. At the gunman's order he stopped finally in an alley behind the Club Romaine. With the man at his heels still poking him with the revolver, the Baron went through a rear entrance into a dirty corridor which reeked of stale liquor, and to Tomara's private office.

Tomara's fat, oily face brightened.

"Good work, Gus," he commended the gunman. Then to the Baron, "Don't get haired up, Tolliver. All I want is to make you a little business proposition. Those race horse pictures of Billings. I'm willing to pay five grand for a look-see at them. What say?"

The Baron's face was wooden. "Why pick on me, Tomara? They're not my pictures."

Tomara laughed. "No, they ain't yours, but you got 'em. And I guess five Gs won't hurt your feelings none."

"How're you going to pay off after they tag you for murder?" the Baron suggested. "I saw you last night, Tomara. You were plenty in a hurry, too."

"Yeah, I know," Tomara agreed. "I saw you, too. And I saw Thomas, only he was already dead. Then I got word you and Howard were handling things. The pictures are gone and I've had Howard followed all day. I know he didn't take 'em so that leaves you. But forget the murder angle. It's not my line."

"What is?"

"Don't be funny, Tolliver. If I pay you five Gs you don't care. See?"

"Reminds me of when I was offered fifty thousand dollars for the Mona Lisa, the time that painting was stolen from the Louvre in Paris. I found Mona all right, but I figured an art treasure like that belongs to humanity, so I wouldn't take the money."

The smile was gone from Tomara's lips.

"What're you trying to do, Tolliver?" he demanded threateningly. "Kid me? Don't be slinging me all that malarkey. Are you going to play ball about those pictures or aren't you?"

"I haven't got the pictures," the Baron said.

Tomara looked at Gus. "Better give this guy a few memory lessons from your course."

For such a big man, Gus moved fast. He feinted with his left and, as the Baron tried to block, caught him on the chin with a hard right. The Baron took a step backward, stumbled over a chair and Gus clipped him flush in the mouth before he could recover.

AS the Baron sprawled across the floor, Gus kicked him in the head.

The Baron was sick on Tomara's nice green carpet. He sat up weak and shaky, a trickle of blood running down his chin from his cut lips.

"That's only a sample, Tolliver," Tomara said. "Maybe you remember now where those pictures are?"

"I told you I haven't got them," the Baron repeated.

Tomara jerked his head toward Gus. "Give him another assignment."

Gus grabbed the Baron with a viselike hand and pulled him to his feet. The Baron lashed out at the man and caught him a hard blow under the ear. It was like hitting a rubber dummy. Gus simply shook his head and waded in. He forced the Baron back against the wall, shooting rights and lefts into the Baron's stomach. When he was finished, the Baron slid down limply to the floor and stayed there.

"Where are those pictures?"

The Baron had trouble in speaking through his swollen lips.

"Curse you! I told you I don't know."

Tomara beckoned Gus and the two men left the room briefly. When they came back Tomara said:

"All right, Tolliver. I guess you don't know after all. My mistake. No hard feelings."

The Baron staggered to his feet and stood there swaying.

"No hard feelings," he muttered. "But, boy, will I pull wires to be a witness when they fry you for killing Thomas."

The Baron called Baldy Leigh from a drug-store phone booth. He cut short his friend's eager questions.

"You're a racing fan, Baldy. You can help me . . . Aw, nuts! I'll admit I don't know a thing about the racing game . . . Yeah. Okay . . . Now I've got to get a look at the records of the Jockey Club. Can you fix it for me . . . Who? Owen Sterling, the Club Secretary? Swell. No. No. It won't wait until morning. We've got to do it tonight. This is red-hot and so am I. That thick-skulled Hogan is likely to pick me up any minute and then I'm sunk. Tell Sterling he'll be helping solve a murder and also helping Laura Billings. Billings was one of Sterling's pals, I believe. I've seen their pictures together in the papers."

The Baron waited in the store until Baldy called him back.

"It's okay," Baldy informed him. "I'm picking up Sterling right away. Meet us at the downtown offices of the club in half an hour."

Sterling was a distinguished-looking man of late middle age, with clear sun-tanned skin and a cockatoo crest of bushy pure white hair. He shook hands with the Baron.

"This isn't at all according to Hoyle," he said, "but anything I can do to help Laura, I'll do."

Baldy Leigh was staring at the Baron's battered features.

"I didn't know you'd been in the retreat from Burma," he observed.

The Baron fingered his jaw tenderly.

"I was too little," he grunted through puffy lips. "And too late. But I scored a great diplomatic victory." He turned to Sterling. "I have here a list of fifty-dollar mutuel tickets. I want to find out what they paid and when."

Sterling took the list and went to a long row of steel file cabinets. He thumbed through the papers inside.

"I feel awfully sorry for Laura," he said. "Everyone thought Long Shot John would leave her nicely fixed. In fact, only a week before he died, he told her he'd made sure she'd never be in want the rest of her life. And yet when he was killed his stable and horses were mortgaged to the hilt and there wasn't a thin dime—" Sterling broke off and said with a note of surprise, "Why this ticket was never cashed!"

He went on through the files again, rapidly. Finally he turned to the Baron.

"Where did you get this list?" he asked. "All these are uncashed tickets. They go back as far as five years. They're on horses from Billings' own stable and the total amount involved would make you gasp."

The Baron grinned. With his cut and swollen lips he looked like a gargoyle.

"Then my hunch was perfect. Tell me, Mr. Sterling, are these tickets cashable now?"

"I'll tell the world!" the Club Secretary said. "The Jockey Club will pay out on any ticket, no matter how long they've been outstanding. Identification isn't necessary, just the tickets themselves."

"Then there's Laura Billings' legacy. There are plenty more of those tickets where these came from." The Baron grinned. "The girl's old man was foxy." He whirled toward the door. "Thanks, and I'll be seeing you fellows later. Now I've got to run."

"Hey!" Baldy called.

STERLING echoed the cry. But the Baron was gone.

He stopped for a moment at the drug store on the corner, put in a call to the Atlas Transportation Company. Getting the manager he said:

"Don't let anyone move that van with the Billings' furniture."

"Don't let anyone move it!" the garage man shouted back. He ripped out a blast of profanity that threatened to crack the receiver. "That truck disappeared an hour ago! And none of our drivers took it out! And you say don't let—"

The Baron didn't hear the rest. He had hung up and was on his way.

The Baron jammed the gas pedal to the floor boards, skidded corners and his puddle jumper roared ahead like an Indianapolis Cup Race entry. He was racing against time now. For once somebody got those uncashed tickets, nobody in the world could prove ownership but the holder.

He covered all of fifteen miles before he swerved from a main thoroughfare into a quiet side street. He switched off his lights as he made the turn. Then he cut the motor and coasted silently in darkness.

Half-way along the block, a driveway led back toward a small dark house set in a wide expanse of lawn. The huge bulk of a moving van with lowered headlights was partly hidden by the trees. The Baron let out a great sigh of relief. His second hunch had not come a cropper.

He pulled his car to the curb a hundred feet farther down the street, leaped out silently and went back on catlike feet.

The driver of the van was around in front of the truck. In the feeble light the Baron could see that the man had Billings' collection of race horse pictures in a heap on the ground. He was busy sliding the backs from the frames.

In the darkness a piece of broken glass snapped under the Baron's feet. The van driver dropped the picture he was holding. He crouched, and almost simultaneously whipped up a gun and fired. Like an angry hornet, the bullet droned past the Baron's ear.

The Baron's body was sore, aching in every joint from the beating Tomara's strong-arm man had handed him. But there was no time now to coddle his bruises. The Baron leaped to the tail of the van. Swiftly he circled, coming around to the front on the other side. The driver was waiting, hunched over and alert. With his battered muscles shrieking protest, the Baron leaped over the fender in a headlong dive.

The man whirled. The gun belched flame just as the Baron connected. He felt a red-hot finger slide along his ribs as he and his opponent did an upside-down rhumba on the concrete driveway.

His gun knocked from his hand, the man's arms snaked out and fastened around the Baron's body. The Baron rolled, trying to break free, but the man rolled with him and wound up on top.

The man's knees were granite slabs as they crushed down on the Baron's arms. Viselike fingers were at the Baron's throat. They grabbed, dug in, and squeezed. The Baron's Adam's apple felt as if it were caught in a cider press. He tasted blood again as his cracked lips reopened.

Fighting for his breath, the Baron managed to jerk one arm away from his antagonist's pinioning leg grip. He struck upward with all his remaining strength and his fist found bone. The van driver's head snapped back, cracked dully against the bottom of the truck's radiator. A limp mass dropped over the Baron. The man was out cold.

The Baron staggered to his feet and looked down. The man was Belden Howard. But the Baron didn't show any surprise. Without a second look, he headed across the lawn to the house.

He found Mrs. Howard waiting for him in the hall. The small, pearl-handled pistol she held blazed as he swung through the door. The slug made a neat hole in the jamb alongside his head. The Baron didn't let her try again. He was beside her in a stride, slapping the gun from her hand.

She started screaming and leaped on him. Raked at his face with long, blood-red nails sharp as the claws of a jungle cat. They tore into the Baron's flesh. Blood oozed from a dozen furrows in his cheeks.

"Where's Laura Billings?" he demanded as he grabbed at the woman's flailing arms.

The woman just glared and tore at him again with her flesh-ripping nails. Without the slightest compunction, the Baron knocked her cold.

LAURA was on a bed upstairs. She was gagged and trussed securely. The Baron untied her, pulled off the gag. He grabbed the phone, called Headquarters, asked for Hogan. After telling the Homicide man where to come, he hung up and faced the girl.

She was sitting up on the bed, rubbing her arms where the tight rope had cut into them. Her eyes were a mixture of emotions —gratitude, fear, complete bewilderment.

"You! "she stammered. "You—why you're the insurance man! How did you get here? What's happened? Who—"

"Wait a minute!" The Baron laughed. "Everything's going to be all right, but let me ask a few questions first. How come you ran out at your house and came here to the Howards?"

The girl's eyes swung up to his.

"I didn't. I was upstairs and I heard somebody cry out. I rushed down and saw Mort lying on the living room floor. He'd been stabbed. Then Howard stepped out of the dark and grabbed me. I accused him of killing Mort. We fought. The lights of a car came up the driveway. Howard hit me with something. Next I knew I was here, all tied up. It was morning."

The girl stopped for breath, smiled wanly.

"Mrs. Howard came in several times and looked at me," she went on, "but said nothing. Later in the afternoon, Howard came

in and made me call the Atlas people and order my furniture picked up. He told Mrs. Howard the police would follow the truck, but he said he had a way to fool them.

"They left the room, but I heard him telling her he intended putting me in the truck and running it over an embankment. I'd be killed and it would look as if I were trying to skip out after murdering poor Mort. He said he'd get an old cap and coat to leave in the truck so it would look as if I'd hired somebody to drive me and the driver had jumped." She shuddered. "It was horrible!"

The Baron swore under his breath.

"Then it must have been Mrs. Howard who phoned your house yesterday," he said. "It was Howard's plan to get himself put in charge, so he could get the pictures himself. But Hogan broke that up. I figured you might be here and that Howard had forced you to call."

"But why all this?" she asked. "What good are Dad's pictures to them?"

"Plenty!" The Baron told her about the uncashed tickets.

"Evidently," he said, "Howard, working as an auditor at the Jockey Club, noticed the large number of fifty-dollar tickets not cashed. He found they covered your father's horses that had paid long-shot prices. He must have mentioned it to your father and learned about the odd legacy.

"When your father was killed before he told you about the pictures, Howard got ideas. He figured he could get the tickets with nobody the wiser. But he had to check on them before he was sure. That first group he got were evidently not pictures of your father's horses. So there were no tickets. Howard made another try."

"I see," she said. "And after knocking me down in the dark he rushed out and joined Mrs. Howard at the front door for an alibi. When did you decide it was Howard?"

"Not until after I'd discovered the tickets and checked on them. Howard's friendship with your dad, his job, and all the rest, added up."

"But Mort, did—" Her voice broke.

"Howard undoubtedly killed your cousin because Mort found out something. Maybe Mort caught him trying again to get at the tickets. After the killing and your appearance, Howard had to figure another way to get the pictures and cover up. Hence the van idea."

"All of which gives me a nice out," a voice purred from the doorway.

The Baron spun, but Tomara's gun made any further action suicidal.

"Oh, you!" the Baron said coolly. "I almost forgot you'd be following me. Well, the pictures are here all right, but they're in charge of the Imperial Casualty Company for sale."

Tomara let a smile spread across his face.

"My business is with Miss Billings now, Tolliver, not you," he said. The club owner faced Laura. "I'm still offering five grand for those pictures. But if you don't take it this time, I'll have to work the hard way. I've got my boys on that truck outside and I'm taking them with me no matter what. You can make it easy for yourself or tough."

THE girl shot a look at the Baron.

The Baron's grin turned into a laugh.

"You wouldn't be checking on that old story about Long Shot Billings writing out his winning system in code on his pictures, would you, Tomara?" he said.

Tomara's features screwed up. "You know everything, don't you," he growled. "Well, it won't do you any good, because I'm getting that system from those pictures and destroying it afterward."

The Baron laughed loudly. "Take his five grand and let him check the writing on those pictures," he said to the girl. "For all it is, is shorthand recording of the winner's record."

"Yeah?" Tomara snapped. "Well, I'll look first before I'm—" He broke off.

A shot came from outside. The Baron leaped forward in a flying mare as Tomara's head shifted at the sound of the shot. He struck the night-club owner midway between the knees and the stomach. It was all over in a second. First because Tomara had been knocked completely cold and second because in stepped Hogan and another detective from Headquarters, shoving the two Howards, Gus and another of Tomara's gorillas in front of them.

"I find Howard and his wife out cold," Hogan growled. "What is—" He broke off as he saw Tomara on the floor. He groaned. "Another one?"

* * * * *

The small bleached blond waitress brought the Baron's morning coffee.

As he stirred it he held forth about the Billings' pictures in a voice which, although fuzzy on account of his puffed and swollen lips, still reached all parts of the Live-and-Let-Live Lunchroom.

"I'd never have figured it," he said, "if I hadn't made such an advanced study of the technical side of horse racing. For years I've been keeping charts and comparative figures. Why once—"

Baldy Leigh's head popped unexpectedly over the edge of the booth in front of the Baron.

"Did I hear you say you were a racing expert, Baron?" Baldy's eyes were mocking.

The Baron gulped. "Oh, hello, Baldy. I thought I heard the boss say he'd sent you upstate today. Have a cup of coffee on me, pal!"

## FAKE VETERANS' ORGANIZATIONS
### Look Out for This Smooth Performer Who Filches Cash from Returned Service Men Under False Pretenses!

EDDIE EGAN was back from the war. His family was glad to have him home. All the boys in the local community welcomed his return. But somehow Eddie didn't fit right into things. There was a barrier between him and the fellows who hadn't been to the front, who hadn't smelled powder and heard the bursting shells.

Eddie wanted to mix with other soldiers who were home on Disability Discharges or out of the Army for other legitimate reasons. They had a kindred feeling for each other. One afternoon Eddie was out in his Victory Garden, working away at the beets, carrots and tomatoes when a fellow turned in at the gate.

"Hello, Sergeant Egan," greeted the newcomer. "I'm Corporal Dillon from the 357th. You probably never noticed me around, but I was up there in the doings at Salerno and the Anzio Beachhead. Too bad we had to miss the big push, wasn't it?"

### A New Outfit

Egan agreed that it was. He and Dillon had quite a conversation. Finally Dillon opened a brief case he was carrying and said:

"I'm plugging for a new outfit something like the American Legion. I don't have to tell you that there are millions of us soldiers in this war, and we're going to have a lot to say about the future of the country. They're not going to push us around after it's over. No more apples for us."

Egan was mildly interested. He asked the usual questions, and Dillon replied with a glowing prospectus that had all the answers. Egan was going to get a charter for a local organization. He could solicit members for his group, and they'd be given membership cards through the National Headquarters. He would be a pioneer.

"You've got to have a soldier's organization," Dillon persisted. "There's been one after every war. There was the G.A.R. after the Civil War; the United Spanish War Veterans after that war, and the American Legion after World War I. We're getting in on the ground floor with the Associated American War Veterans."

Eddie Egan thought there ought to be such a group. He inquired for more details.

"You can sign up as a charter member for fifty dollars," Dillon told him glibly. The supposed benefits from the organization, including life insurance, disability benefits, etc., made fifty dollars sound cheap. "Then if you want to go ahead with the local group," the organizer went on, "your charter would cost you five hundred dollars. You ought to be able to get ten war veterans to contribute that."

Eddie paid his fifty dollars, received his membership card from Dillon and then went around among his friends trying to organize the local chapter. One of his older friends in a long-established veteran's organization stopped him on the street a few days later and asked:

"What's this new Associated American War Veterans outfit you're working with?"

### A Surprising Comeback

Eddie explained it, expecting to hear the old-timer pour cold water on the plan, because of possible competition with his own group, but he wasn't ready for the comeback he received:

"Too bad, Eddie," he said. "We heard about those chiselers down at the Post and we had them investigated by the Better Business Bureau. That's a racket. How much did they nick you for?"

Eddie told them about the fifty dollars. Then he explained about the "local charter." "At least I didn't send that five hundred in," he said. "It would have gone the same way, I suppose."

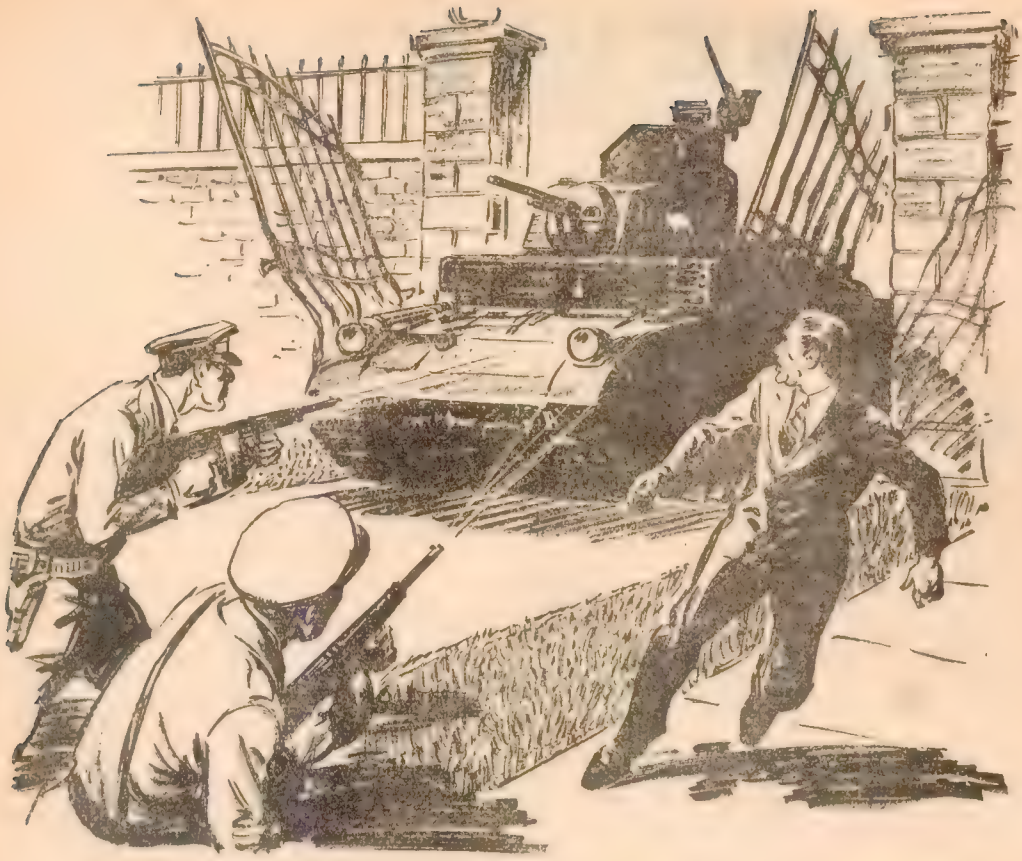
### The Trap

The First World War Veteran said:

"That's good bait, Eddie. Write a letter to this fellow Dillon, and we'll get him out here to collect the five hundred bucks. Then we'll be able to nab him."

Egan followed the suggestion, and Dillon was caught. The hero sergeant had learned his lesson.

There are plenty of legitimate, long established organizations that know and help the veteran such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Disabled American War Veterans, etc. Any one of these can be a help to the returned veteran, and they have been chartered by Congress or by other State or Federal authorities. Beware of the fly-by-night catch-penny organizer.



The tank crashed the iron gate, collecting scrap metal for the war

# PA HOWDY MANS A TANK

## By LAURENCE DONOVAN

*Not a Jeep, but a Juggernaut, Is This Old-Timer's Weapon When He Battles to Clean Out a Foul Nazi Nest!*

THE steel-pointed arrow that whizzed straight through Pa Howdy's beloved J. B. Stetson hat parted his iron-gray hair. It had been shot above the high stone wall over which Pa Howdy had been attempting to peer.

"Injuns, Ma, by gum!" twanged Pa, as he reined in his tall roan horse. "And they ain't been Injuns shootin' arrers for nigh onto a hundred years! Look at that hat!"

Ma Howdy, plump, round-faced and complacent, was in the deep saddle on a rough-coated paint pony. Her voice took on an edge as she replied to the retired Cattle Association detective from Montana.

"Land sakes, Pa! Yuh got a long recollection, ain't yuh? And them arrer shooters in there has on short pants. All the Injuns I've ever read about don't wear none, leastwise when they take to the warpath."

The retired Nemesis of cow rustlers dropped from his roan to retrieve his punctured Stetson.

"Ain't another'n to be had for love or money for the duration," he opined mournfully. "The shooter of that arrer is payin' for the same, even if he is a sick man. Dangnation, Ma! What's sick men

doin' shootin' arrers?"

Pa Howdy's eyes flicked to the high wall, to the turrets or the stucco monstrosity inside it, and to the neat sign over the main gateway that read:

SANITARIUM

For days now, Pa Howdy had been edging up to inquiries about this sanitarium; ever since, from his big roan's saddle, he had seen over that high wall. The suffering patients of the Dr. Allen Sanitarium, mostly men, appeared to be taking peculiar treatment. The men, and the few women, seemed addicted to short pants and playful moods soon after their arrival, although they nearly always came wrapped in blankets, attended by nurses, and apparently in the last stages of whatever sickness had brought them to the well-known Dr. W. Allen. The L. A. directory said he was a heart specialist.

With his damaged Stetson suspended on long, big-knuckled fingers, Pa Howdy was eyeing the closed iron gates some distance away with a speculative tightening of his hard lips. Above the gates was a sign larger than the name of the sanitarium, reading:

NO VISITORS ADMITTED AT ANY TIME

"Well, by jinks!" he said. "They're admittin' one visitor danged pronto, Ma!"

Ma Howdy shifted her old-fashioned reticule, which a modern woman would call a handbag, and Pa Howdy called her "reediculous."

"You can't go bustin' into a place of sickness and sufferin' on account of a wore-out hat. Besides, them two rannies comin' from the gate look as if they meant to take care of the damage."

Pa Howdy sized up the two burly fellows in white uniforms. Their hands were empty. But Pa Howdy's experienced eyes knew the meaning of the bulges under their white coats.

"Them ain't bandannas they're totin' under their left arms," he said. "And yuh said a place of sickness and sufferin', Ma. Hear that?"

The angry voice of a man floated over the wall.

"You get out there and find that arrow, Tanger! I don't care if you're not supposed to go outside!"

Pa Howdy saw a smaller iron gate open. A youth of not more than sixteen or seventeen, also in a white uniform, came out furtively. Closer than the two men from the main gate the boy came over quickly, looking at Pa Howdy's hat, and at the arrow which Pa Howdy had picked up.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. "I'm sure the boss will pay—"

"You Tanger!" one of the approaching men in white, a thick-browed and sullen man, rapped out. "Whatcha you doin' out here? Grab that arrow and lam back inside! You know the rules."

PA HOWDY saw the boy cringe as if in fear, and he also saw a blue bruise under the boy's left eye, and a welt across his left ear.

The boy reached to take the arrow from Pa Howdy's hand. But the stubborn old rider from the Montana range said: "Never mind, younker. I'm collectin' on this arrer personal. Mebbe yuh'll miss a ruckus by doin' as yuh're bid."

"Pa Howdy, yuhre not stickin' yore chin out," said Ma Howdy.

The boy stared at Pa Howdy, and gasped.

"Pa Howdy! I've read about you! Mr. Howdy, I have something to tell you. If I can see you tonight—"

Before Pa Howdy could intervene, one of the burly men leaped in and slapped the side of the boy's head resoundingly. It staggered the boy and it uncoupled Pa Howdy's long arm with a whiplike blow. The big man in white went down like a poled ox.

"Why, you meddlin' old billy goat!" howled the other big man. "I guess the boss will want to look you over! I'll just take you—"

Two things happened to that guard as he reached for the gun under his coat.

Pa Howdy's long leg kicked backward and his spurred heel cracked the gun guard's knee-cap.

"Land o' Goshen!" shrilled Ma Howdy, and her huge old reticule described a half circle, landing on the top of the second guard's head.

The guard went down, cold. That old reticule contained much more than cosmetics. Its contents included, among other weighty objects, an automatic

shooting-iron and a hefty flashlight with a red bulb.

The boy, Tanger, gulped as he looked at the inert guards.

"Gosh, Pa Howdy!" he said. "I wish you hadn't done that. But I do want to talk to you tonight. Where, Mr. Howdy?"

"Wilshire Hotel, son," said Pa. "Eight o'clock?"

"Yeah, I'll be there——"

As Pa Howdy handed the boy the arrow a strident, angry voice called out impatiently from inside the wall:

"Tanger, you bringing that arrow?"

Pa Howdy started purposefully toward the small iron gate from which the boy had come. The boy became almost tearful.

"Please, Mr. Howdy, don't try to go in!"

"Gracious, Pa!" exclaimed Ma Howdy. "Can't yuh show a lick o' sense? If Sergeant Hemple hears of you usin' violence upon doctors carin' for sick folks, he'll take away our hosses. Besides, there comes a couple others, and what looks like the head man."

Ma Howdy had, as usual, ignored her own act of putting one guard to sleep. Pa Howdy cocked an eye toward three more men in white, and a taller, dignified figure in sombre black coming from the main gate.

Nevertheless, Pa Howdy was at the smaller gate as the boy opened it and scuttled inside. And he did manage to get one glimpse of the archers in short pants before about a dozen of them, with four or five young and pretty women, darted into shrubbery like scared rabbits.

"I wouldn't try to enter," said a cold, steady voice behind Pa Howdy. "I assure you I shall invoke the law. I am Dr. Allen, and this sanitarium is not open to the public." He nodded. "Yes, I see you have had your old hat torn. I will pay for that, of course, then you must ride on at once."

The eyes of the tall, black-haired, sallow-featured Dr. Allen were black and angry, although his voice was calm. The hard-faced white-clad guards with him brought their fallen companions to their feet.

"Land sakes!" exclaimed Ma Howdy. "Can't yuh see we ain't wanted? We'll be ridin', Mr.—Dr. Allen. Pa's just het up about his old hat."

DR. ALLEN smiled thinly.

"I'll pay you twice what the hat's worth," he said, fishing out a ten-spot and tendering it to Pa Howdy. "And I'll ask you to stay out of this street. Saddle horses and trucks are prohibited by law from passing the sanitarium."

Pa Howdy was looking at the ten-dollar note.

"This J. B. hat cost forty," he said, "and it can't be replaced today for twice that. Seein' yuh want to pay, it'll be a hundred flat."

Two minutes later Pa and Ma Howdy were riding.

"Ma," Pa Howdy said, "when a sawbones wants to keep out visitin' folks so bad he'll pay a hundred for a hat and never bat an eye, it'll bear lookin' into. Wonder what that younker will have to palaver about this evenin'?"

"Pa Howdy, yuh been stopped as a raid warden on account of yore propensities for trouble," admonished Ma. "We ain't even allowed our police radio car for pleasurin.' And Sergeant Hemple said the next time we start mindin' law business, he's takin' our hosses."

Riding along in the L. A. evening dusk, Ma Howdy was crocheting furiously. She went on talking.

"Pa, I wisht yuh hadn't let that younker go back into that place of short-panted men an' brazen women, even if they are sick. I've a feelin' in my bones we ain't meetin' that younker tonight."

"Shucks, Ma!" reassured Pa Howdy. "Reckon we're just imaginin' things. But shore as tunket, Dr. Allen is dead set against havin' visitors. . . ."

Tanger failed to arrive at the Wilshire Hotel at eight o'clock. When he was not there at ten, Pa Howdy became restive.

"Dangnation!" he exploded. "Think I'll get a breath of air and a smoke, Ma."

Ma Howdy's round face was mild.

"I've already ordered the hosses brought around, Pa," she said. "But we're just ridin'. No more hightailin' after police calls."

The voice of the police announcer came from one of the saddle-pockets on Pa Howdy's big roan horse, five minutes after Pa and Ma Howdy rode away from the hotel. A compact short-wave radio was in that pocket.

"Signal Thirty-four—attention, Cars Six and Eight—go to Vine and Wilshire . . . Signal Thirty-four—"

Once Pa Howdy had responded to radio calls in his old jaloppy. The car was up for the duration. The Montana horses had been substituted.

"Now, Pa, mind yore failin'," promptly admonished Ma Howdy. "That's the homicidal signal, ain't it? But Sergeant Hemple said he'd take our hosses next time, so we ain't goin'."

Nevertheless, a few minutes later Pa and Ma Howdy dismounted cautiously a short distance from two police cars and a group of curious persons. Pa Howdy concealed the horses under a huge pepper tree.

Red-headed, gruff Sergeant Hemple, of the Homicide Squad, was holding forth in a loud tone. The police medical examiner had just completed a preliminary examination.

"You say he's a heart case, Doc?" exclaimed Sergeant Hemple. "Then the wrong call was made. Anyhow he's nothin' but a bindle stiff."

Pa Howdy and Ma Howdy edged in closer. Pa muttered under his breath as he saw the face of the corpse.

"One of them the city'll have to plant," complained Hemple. "Shoes from Seattle. Shirt from Denver. Coat from Salt Lake. Cap from Kansas City. Nothin' but a dollar and want ads for dishwashers. . . . Okay, put him in the wagon."

"The lad must've swiped everything he's wearing from swells," said the Doc. "Everything from shoes to his cap are almost new and they cost real dough."

"Some guys always hand out clothes to bums," said Sergeant Hemple.

THEN his roving eyes alighted upon Pa Howdy's bony face.

"Well, if it ain't my good friends, Pa and Ma Howdy!" he cracked. "That makes three times I've warned you on police calls."

"We was just out walkin', Captain Hemple, sir," said Ma Howdy timidly.

"I ain't a captain, and you dang well know it!" roared Sergeant Hemple.

"Come on, Ma," Pa Howdy interrupted in a slow, nasal drawl. "We'll be shaggin' along. Sort of peculiar that a younker like that would've kicked off from a bad heart. But then they ain't a better lawman in L. A. when it comes to makin' natural deaths out'n murder and savin' hisself wear an' tear."

"Hey, you!" Sergeant Hemple was furious. "What you mean murder?"

"It's gettin' so a person can't go out for a peaceable walk," said Ma Howdy, then her gentle voice suggested: "Seems as how, if I was a lawman, I'd check close on what fancy dudes bought them duds that poor, dead boy's wearin'."

Whereupon, Ma and Pa Howdy walked away from Sergeant Hemple, from the boy who was to have talked with Pa Howdy, and their horses back under the pepper tree.

When they were a few blocks away, Pa Howdy said:

"Ma, I'm nigh positive we're bein' trailed. Mebbe Sergeant Hemple thinks we did have hosses, we'll sashay back to 'em."

"Pa, it ain't the law I see keepin' an eye upon us," said Ma Howdy placidly. "I've just seen one of the gents who was up at that sanitarium this afternoon."

Pa Howdy's keen eyes darted about. They were in dimout shadows. Lights were shaded at the edge of the Figuroa Street plaza where two young Army lieutenants were demonstrating a brand-new light Army tank, and a War Bond sale was being conducted.

Before Pa Howdy could answer, there was a sudden, silent, well-organized rush of half a dozen dark-clad men. Blows hammered at Pa Howdy's shoulders, hard, quiet blows that had the weight of blackjacks in them.

Pa Howdy had one glimpse of Ma Howdy in the firm grasp of two dark-clad men who had clamped her mouth shut. Dizzied, Pa Howdy thought he saw another woman who seemed to be supported by one man who was holding her arm.

Then it was all over so quickly that Pa Howdy, for all of his rawhide toughness, went down under the hammering weight. And he was aware, as he fell, that the attack had gone unnoticed, with the Army tank clanking and thundering, and a loud-speaker calling upon the crowd to buy Bonds. . . .

The next thing he knew, Ma was forcing brandy between his lips, but what she was saying did not make much sense.

"Pa, we've got to light a shuck out'n

here, or we'll be took to the calaboose for havin' a woman corpse on our hands. . . . Listen, Pa! Them's sirens!"

Pa Howdy's aching brain recorded the distant police sirens. All of their silent attackers had disappeared. Only the body of a frail woman, crumpled on the lawn back of the sidewalk, remained.

"By thunder, Ma!" Pa Howdy twanged out. "She *is* dead! An' she's been beat up! We have to do somethin' and do it quick, Ma!"

"Pa, them hellions slugged yuh and left yuh here for the law!" declared Ma Howdy. Her flashlight came from her reticule, flashed on.

"Don't know how they done it, Pa," she exclaimed. "But they's skin off yore face in that dead woman's fingernails. And yuh got clawin' marks across yore nose!"

"Cut off that danged light!" rasped Pa Howdy. "We're gettin' out of here! Somebody knew we reconized that dead boy! It's been made to look as if we was in a ruckus with this gal, and killed her!"

A SCREAMING police car came into view about two blocks away, its red light flashing. Ma Howdy caught Pa's arm, but already he had the light figure of the dead woman in his long arms.

"We're hightailin', Ma," he grated. "If'n I ain't figgerin' wrong, this here's another heart case, and the police won't listen to ary yarn we tell."

Pa Howdy had often been in tight spots. But with a woman's corpse in his arms, he had never been more closely squeezed between perdition and the deep blue sea.

It was then that Pa Howdy's eyes alighted upon the Army tank, alone at the edge of the plaza, its motors still growling. The two young lieutenants were mounting the speaker's stand.

"Ma, get back to the hotel!" rapped Pa Howdy. "I'm shore as tunket deliverin' this gal where I think she belongs!"

"Pa, the Army—the Navy—the Marines! Good gravy! They'll shoot yuh for—"

"Get back to the hotel, Ma!"

The police car had stopped half a block away. Evidently the law didn't know the exact spot to look for this reported sudden death.

Pa Howdy went through tall trees, carrying the limp woman toward the tank. He knew but little about Army tanks, but he figured the iron monster couldn't be any tougher than many broncs he had busted.

Keeping the tank between him and the crowd, he deposited the strange woman inside the tank turret. Then, investigating the maze of levers that controlled the fighting machine, he identified only the mechanism that threw the tank into gear.

The motor growled, took hold. In five seconds Pa Howdy was in a dizzy spin. One track was in reverse. In the terrific racket he could not hear the crowd. But he could see mouths open, screaming, and the lieutenants jumping from the stand.

Feeling as if he were aboard a sunfishing bucker, Pa Howdy yanked first one lever, then another.

"Giddap, yuh dangnation ripsnorter!"

By bull luck he got the tank straightened out, but it was not by any skill of his that it skidded onto a lawn, then across into the street upon which police cars were converging.

Red lights flashed and sirens screamed. But Pa Howdy noted with satisfaction that police car drivers cleared a way for him.

"Like as not Sergeant Hemple's in charge," mused Pa Howdy. "Sure as tophet he's got a murder. He . . . Ma! How in tarnation did you get here?"

Ma Howdy's round face showed in the vague light inside the jolting, rolling tank. And she was trying to tell Pa Howdy something that he could not hear.

Pa glanced at the woman he had carried into the tank. Too late he realized that removing the victim of homicide from the scene made him an accessory to the killing, even if he had been framed.

But grimly Pa Howdy headed in the general direction of the Dr. Allen Sanitarium, the tank slewing sideward at times, chopping down shrubbery.

Ma was peering through the slitted opening at the side.

"The law's closin' in!" she yelled.

Ma was right. Two converging police cars blocked the street intersection at the top of the hill.

"Yuh confounded nincompoops."

twanged Pa Howdy, and shot the tank ahead at higher speed.

THE tank collected a fender and a bumper from one police car and clanked ahead. When no shots came Pa Howdy chuckled.

"Reckon they ain't got ary rules about how to round up an Army tank with them peashooters they're totin'," he shouted. "And that Doc Allen ain't ary means of keepin' out visitors that come callin' the way the boys busted up them duds in Tunisia."

"Pa, yuh can't do such!" screamed Ma. "But if yuh hope to get to that sanitarium, yuh could cut this iron bronc straight through that mess of brush and hill where they ain't nary road!"

Pa Howdy saw her point. The only hilltop street circling to the outlying neighborhood of the sanitarium called for traveling at least four miles. And down through tangled brush and an abandoned real estate project, then up a hillside impassable for any motor car, the lights of the Dr. Allen institution were but a scant half mile away.

"Hang onto yore uppers, Ma!" yelled Pa Howdy.

With police cars carrying profane and puzzled city lawmen already hedging him in, but unable to do anything about it, Pa Howdy sent the tank into a dive that rattled his own teeth.

A tank designed to chase Japzi monkeys in mountainous jungles did a fast buck-and-wing through small trees and over rough rocks. Pa Howdy had but one glimpse of Ma as the tank started up the stiff grade to the sanitarium. She was holding the limp woman in her capacious arms. Ma Howdy would take many bruises herself rather than permit that poor victim to be tossed about.

The tank walked up that hill like a young cougar taking to a tree. Pa Howdy smiled grimly as he saw lights of the police cars scarcely more than a third of the way around the only highway.

Then he was looking at the high wall, the ornate iron gates, and half a dozen white-clad men who had come rushing out, holding guns openly.

Two guards opened fire. Then the tall Doc Allen appeared suddenly holding up his hand.

"Wantin' I should stop and palaver!" shouted Pa Howdy. "No visitors allowed, huh? Ma, they's one place to find out why young Tanger died suddenly of heart failure!"

"Pa, yuh can't!" Ma was screaming. "The law'll be right on our tails! An' after us snaggin this Army tank, we'll be in the calaboose for life! Pa! . . . We'll hit 'em hard!"

Dr. Allen sprang aside just in time. Two white-clad guards jumped out with tommy-guns. Just as the tank crashed the iron gates, collecting scrap metal for the war effort, Pa Howdy felt a bullet that came through a slit, gash his cheek.

He was headed along the graveled driveway then. Shadowy figures darted into the trees. Pa was wondering what it was that Tanger had meant to tell him.

"She's big," muttered Pa, skidding the tank around on a wide lawn. "Otherwise, why'd they take the trouble to leave that younker dead, dressed up in duds from here and yon? And why'd they have to frame me and—"

Two crazy things happened. Pa Howdy had glanced over his shoulder. His heart almost stopped when he saw Ma had been hit by a glancing slug. And the blood on her face was being wiped off by the "dead" woman.

The hardened old range dick, shivering, practically lost control of the thundering tank, if he had ever had it. And before him a dozen figures suddenly appeared, their hands held high, as if part of some army that had just been licked and were trying to surrender.

GUNFIRE spouted from trees, but Pa Howdy did not even hear the useless hail of steel upon the armored tank. He was too busy attempting to miss those surrendering "patients."

"Dangnation, you dudes tryin' to commit suicide?" yelled Pa Howdy.

The fantastic line of men extended across the only open space, all the way to a blank wall of stucco. Getting the tank tuned, Pa Howdy chose to crash the wall. He didn't see Doc Allen's patients melt away before a blasting explosion. The armored tank was apparently in the center of a force that peeled off one whole side of the concrete and stucco building.

Dazed by a dazzling white light as the tank thrust inside the sanitarium, Pa Howdy had one glimpse of what appeared to be a hospital ward. Two score

or more "patients" had been aroused by the explosion. And other blasts, at a distance, were being set off like gigantic firecrackers.

"Ma—Ma!" Pa Howdy yelled, conscious that the initial blast had conked the tank's motor. "Keep down! Yore sufferin' heart patients seem to think we're the whole United States Army!"

Pajama-clad men were standing stiffly at attention, young men whose hands were lifted above their heads in surrender.

To Pa Howdy's great relief, Ma replied to his words.

"And we ain't bein' took for murder, Pa!" Ma said shrilly. "The gal yuh toted off is back from the dead, and she's Mary Tanger who'd just got here to see her brother on account of a letter he wrote her! She was give—"

What the supposed murder victim had been given to make her appear dead had to wait. For Pa Howdy was looking on a scene of horror beyond any imaginings.

"Gimme yore gun, Ma!" he sung out, and as he took the gun from her hand he covered her eyes.

It was a fiendish scene. Dr. Allen was walking steadily down the middle of the long, white room, a flame-thrower held before him.

Blue fire streaked from side to side. Where it touched a standing man and his iron-frame bed, man and bed both dissolved in a ghastly smoking cloud.

Half a dozen men had died, instantly cremated, when the others broke, screaming. Then all were running, heedless of the tank.

"Stop and stand, *Schweine,*" thundered Dr. Allen. "You agreed on oath that the United States would never get you!"

A few halted. Others ran pellmell toward the tank, with the deadly fire whipping at their legs.

"*Schweinhunde Amerikanische!*" Dr. Allen shouted at the tank. "Why don't you turn on your guns? You'll take none of us alive!"

Pa Howdy slammed lead through the firing slit, two shots, almost as one. Dr. Allen screamed then. Pa Howdy had smashed both his elbows.

But the nozzle attached to a flexible, fireproof metal dropped to the floor and writhed about like a terrible destroying snake.

Half the room was blazing as Pa Howdy made for the tank turret. That terrific chemical flame had destroyed iron beds as if they had been made of straw. This tank—

Dr. Allen was trying to get control of the flame-thrower with his feet.

"Don't go out, Pa Howdy!" pleaded the woman they had believed dead. "My brother tried to tell you that this supposed sanitarium is all a huge sabotage set-up. He had heart trouble, and came here innocently. He couldn't get out.

"Dr. Allen has all sorts of explosives and chemicals stored here. His supposed patients are American-born, or Nazis long in this country. He gets them deferred by heart stimulant injections, then they go out on sabotage missions everywhere!"

EVEN as Pa Howdy absorbed this startling information he was opening the turret cover. A blast of blue flame appeared to eat through the turret and he was forced to drop back.

Explosions were still coming from other buildings in the extensive grounds.

Pa Howdy felt choked, in the increasing heat. He could hear Ma's wheezing breath.

"Dr. Allen boasted he'd destroy everything and everyone if his sabotage plant was discovered!" wailed Mary Tanger. "We'll all die! I was given a heavy injection of heart stimulant, before I was left in your hands. But my poor brother was given enough to kill him! I want you and Ma Howdy to know he thought you were the greatest—"

Pa Howdy sighted Dr. Allen through the firing slit. The fanatical saboteur whose reputation as a great heart specialist had enabled him to build up an institution of treason and death, was on the floor, guiding the flame-thrower toward the tank with his feet and on his face was a gloating murder lust.

Pa Howdy planted a bullet squarely between the doctor's eyes. The flame-thrower fell and danced about. The room was walled in by fire.

Breathing with difficulty, nearly blinded, Pa Howdy groped at everything within reach among the tank's control levers.

"Giddap or back up, yuh danged, balky, mule-brained—"

The motor roared to life. Pa Howdy felt the shock of the tank climbing over wreckage, plunging through. There was a crash of metal and the tank balked once more.

Pa Howdy's eyebrows were singed off when he emerged from the turret. The first voice he heard was Sergeant Hemple's.

"Lookit, wouldja! I had to be drivin' my own personal car, and there ain't enough left of it for scrap metal!"

"Howdy, Sergeant Hemple!" twanged Pa Howdy as he slid down from the turret. "By hokey! That wouldn't be yore jaloppy, would it, Sarge?"

He gazed sadly at a heap of scrap and exploded rubber under the rearing tracks of the Army tank.

"*You?*" Sergeant Hemple exploded. "And Ma Howdy?"

Ma Howdy's mild round face, marred some by a slight wound, appeared over the edge of the tank turret. Mary Tanger was beside her.

"You've done yore biggest chore, Captain Hemple," said Ma Howdy. "I'll get the Government gives yuh a decoration for rootin' out this den of Nazi iniquity."

"You're murderers, both of you!" shouted Sergeant Hemple. "You were seen to put the corpse of a woman you killed in that tank when you stole it."

Police had lined up Dr. Allen's surviving "patients." Six sanitarium buildings had been wrecked by blasts. Four were still burning. But Sergeant Hemple was still shouting belligerently when a tall, raw-boned man wearing a colonel's bars stepped from a military car that had just made a round of the grounds.

"It's a great clean-up, Sergeant Hemple!" said the colonel enthusiastically. "Since seeing what a storehouse of destruction this sanitarium was, I can understand why your men pressed one of our tanks into service. One saboteur who confessed says it was your men in the tank who got Dr. Allen, the ringleader, a spy in this country since the last war."

SERGEANT HEMPLE choked, and then looked significantly at Pa and Ma Howdy

"And who are these people, Sergeant Hemple?" demanded the colonel.

"We was ridin' by on our hosses, Colonel," spoke up Ma Howdy. "An almighty explosion scared the beasts, and they run off. Captain Hemple has helped us out other times when us old folks got into trouble. I reckon he wouldn't mind havin' some of his men catch our hosses for us now."

"For yore personal book, Sarge," Pa Howdy said softly into the policeman's ear, "the gal with Ma Howdy is the sister of that younker yuh was passin' off as a heart case. His name was Martin Tanger, and he was murdered by Dr. Allen and his saboteurs. We just stumbled onto all the how and why of Dr. Allen's heart treatment system to keep saboteurs out of the draft. Now Sergeant Himpel, it'll pleasure Ma and me and Mary Tanger if yuh detail one of yore law cars to tote us to where we left our hosses."

"Well, Sergeant Hemple," said the colonel, "I suppose you will be able to give us a detailed report as to what led you to this Nazi nest?"

"Yeah—yes sir!" stated Sergeant Hemple emphatically. Then: "Pa Howdy, you're welcome to one of our cars any time you lose your horses."

"And you'll be welcome to borrow one of our hosses some time, Captain Hemple," Ma Howdy said sweetly. "Seein' as how yuh've lost yore personal car."

•

*Pa and Ma Howdy go into a welter of fast action when sudden death and ghastly sabotage stalk a powdered egg plant in a story packed with suspense*

# CANNED DEATH

By

## LAURENCE DONOVAN

ONE OF NEXT ISSUE'S FEATURED MYSTERIES!

# *A Department for Cipher Solvers*

## By M. K. DIRIGO

BELIEVING that the neophyte who asks for help and advice should get it, we offer herewith a helping hand. Although only a few of our readers, who are beginners in the science of cryptography, have asked us for a *few more hints* on those limericks, we feel that if properly encouraged these same beginners will one day become experts. So we will show you how to pick up a few more hints yourself.

In this month's limerick (Cryptogram No. 324) for example, you are told to:

(1) fill in that one-letter word;
(2) find "E" through frequency;
(3) fill in the popular three-letter word;

and that's all, brother!

This is the place where you are asking for more clues instead of the "that's all, brother."

Well, let us assume that you have followed the first two suggestions and have got that far. We will set up the cryptogram and see what it looks like up to that point.

*A A A E*
IYLK Y ELZOJLBZ PYHLBD EHCP
*EA E*
IDYJJUD

*A A A*
AMV RYH ACBKI YKB IJYPFI
*E A A A*
ADNYMID JOYJ'UU

*E E E E*
ZLQD CMH ACVI JOD DKZD
*E E E E E*
VCMH JDB FDHNDBJ FUDKZD

*E A*
RLUU RLB JOD PCIJ NHLJLNYU
*A E*
AYJJUD

You want to know of course how to fill in clue No. 3, for that popular three-letter word. You all know that "THE" is the most frequent three-letter word in the English language. Look at your choice of three-letter words above.

AMV RYH YBK CMH JOD RLB

If you have filled in the letter "E", you will have only one of these words ending in "E", so that if any of them at all will substitute for "THE", it must be JOD.

Well, then—that gives you two new letters to substitute, the "T" and the "H" of the "THE".

That is what is meant by "that's all brother, you're on your own." Go ahead and fill in all the "T"s and "H"s.

After that you are really on your own. Look around for obvious clues. The last word in the third line, for example, E——E, could only be "EDGE" to make any sense. That means that the "K" is "D" and the "Z" is "G". Well—fill them in. What are you waiting for? Now the cryptogram looks like this:

*A D A GHT G A E*
IYLK Y ELZOJLBZ PYHLBD EHCP
*EATT E*
IDYJJUD

*A D A TA*
AMV RYH ACBKI YBK IJYPFI
*E A E THAT*
ADNYMID JOYJ'UU

*G E THE EDGE*
ZLQD CMH ACVI JOD DKZD
*TE E E T EDGE*
VCMH JDB FDHNDBJ FUDKZD

*THE T T A*
RLUU RLB JOD PCIJ NHLJLNYU
*ATT E*
AYJJUD

The beginner will soon get the pleasant surprise of learning that every new letter filled in offers a new clue for still another one.

Can't you just look at the third word and guess the suffix? What else could it be? It's really as easy as that! The word ends with "ING", which gives you two more letters to substitute.

By the time you get through filling in these two new letters you will be able to read almost the entire cryptogram. Try it and see.

If you are still stumped by a few words at the end of a cryptogram, that is, after picking up all the obvious clues, then try pattern words. You will find them very helpful in solving cryptograms. Study the

*(Turn to page 62)*

# TRY TO SOLVE THESE FIVE NEW CRYPTOGRAMS

HERE is an especially interesting set of new ciphers to test your wits. In addition to the clues, this month we give you many other hints to help you in solving the limerick for beginners. Study the introduction to this month's "Black Chamber" carefully.

The solutions to the five cryptograms below will be given in the next issue. In the meantime, please send your solutions in. A postcard will do as well as a sealed letter. Address all communications to The Black Chamber, % G-MEN DETECTIVE, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. Questions of general interest will be answered in this department under the "Answers to Letters" heading.

*No. 324. A Limerick for Beginners.*

IYLK Y ELZOJLBZ PYHLBD EHCP IDYJJUD
AMV RYH ACBKI YBK IJYPFI ADNYMID JOYJ'UU
ZLQD CMH ACVI JOD DKZD
VCMH JDB FDHNDBJ FUDKZD
RLUU RLB JOD PCIJ NHLJLNYU AYJJUD!

*CLUES:* (1) Fill in that one-letter word. (2) Find "E" through high-frequency. (3) Then fill in the most frequent three-letter word in the English language. That's all brother—you're on your own!

*No. 325. Show Others What You Can Do.*

CX CO VEX OGBBCACSVX XE JIPS

KFSIX WGIDCXCSO ZS NGOX RS
IRDS XE NIUS MFEMSF GOS EB XJSN.

*No. 326. A Latin Proverb.*

KMO QSOWYQU SIIMQZYXM OS MVM
ST MRT PM ZMMQ ST WMRTN
LQNMT R TSSJ CWMTM R PSV TMZYNMZ.

*No. 327.—(S-H-H-H.)*

LBJDHDIJLBZ NCBQDHIYJLCB DBHLNODI JOD
MBKDHIJYBKLBZ AMJ ICULJMKD
LI JOD INOCCU CE ZDBLMI.

—ZLAACB.

*No. 328. PEDANTIC PROVERB—Submitted by P. S. MacArthur, Cleveland, Ohio.*

XBCYXPXJXWK QKUXBKP YBJXFKUA VKTJL
PYGKSXBVYOKV JLSZYDL XBPTJXTHUK CYKPJ
QZS GSZWZOTJXWK XBQZSFTJXZB.

**First solve the cryptogram, then convert it into plain English.**

lists which we give you in every issue.

We will appreciate hearing from the beginners who asked for this little extra help. Let us know if this little lesson really did you some good and if you want more of it, or can you now really go on your own?

## ANSWERS TO LETTERS

*P. S. MacArthur,* Cleveland, Ohio: Thanks for the "Pedantic Proverb" Mac. You'll find it in this issue.

I see you are still a hundred percenter in our solutions. Congratulations!

*James C. Bailey,* 246 North Smart St., Greenwood, Indiana: Thanks for those fine solutions.

*QUEMADO,* Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Congratulations. Hope you didn't have too much trouble with that cipher. Errors did creep in unfortunately, and we are very sorry about it. They were not deliberate. We received your challenge crypt. If you care to write something about your cipher—including the solution and modus operandi, we will be glad to publish it for the benefit of our readers. Why don't you try it?

*Walter J. Van de Vort* (VANOCRYPT), 6011 South Blackstone Avenue, Chicago 37, Illinois: Congratulations on your first attempt at solutions. Three out of five is not bad at all. Keep up the good work.

*David Kahn,* Windsor Gate, Great Neck, New York: The pattern words have not yet been published in book form. Glad to have you join our ranks.

*Lt. Robert Sinnott,* Ft. Washington, Maryland: Your solutions and charts are tops, Lieutenant, as usual. Thank you.

*Pvt. H. E. Langen* (HELCRYPT), Maxwell Field, Alabama: It's a pleasure to hear from you after this long interlude. We are happy to hear of your fine work and congratulations on your apopintment to the teaching staff of the American Academy of Criminology. More power to you Helcrypt, and lots of luck.

*Charles Hubert Desnoyers,* 4755 St. Hubert St., Montreal, Quebec, Canada: Sorry to say that our Pattern Word List has not been published in book form as yet.

*Charles Sedenger* (SHERLAC), 3835 Darien St., Philadelphia 40, Pennsylvania: Will be glad to receive that complete breakdown of No. 156. Thanks.

*Mrs. Frances A. Harris* (S-TUCK), 21 Duffield Road, Auburndale 66, Massachusetts: Received your "Unearthing a Caesar" but haven't had a chance to go over it yet. It looks good. Thanks a lot.

*Mokaz,* Brooklyn, New York: I don't know where you may get a complete collection of historical ciphers such as the "Abraham Lincoln" telegram, and the one about Pershing's sailing instructions which we published in the last issue. Major Donald D. Millikin was kind enough to let us use these two from his personal collection.

## Answers to Cryptograms in Summer Issue

*No. 319*—Said a farmer from Wilmington, Del.
"Every War Bond we buy is a shell
Or a bomb or a gun
And the war won't be won
Till we all invest money like hl."

*No. 320*—Any man will naturally hesitate to question his wife's judgment when he remembers whom she married.

*No. 321*—Nature has given to man one tongue but two ears that we may hear from others twice as much as we speak.

*No. 322*—Great men eventually need direction. Even though everybody concedes them infallibility voluble enemies may argue grimly about zealous intent not evident.
(Hidden message is in the initial letters of each word—G-MEN DETECTIVE MAGAZINE.)

*No. 323*—Unjustifiable volitional acceleration invariably terminates in unnecessary dissipation of resources.
In Plain English; "Haste makes waste."

## HANDY LIST OF PATTERN WORDS

PATTERN words are words in which any letter of the alphabet is repeated two or more times. Our "Handy List of Pattern Words," which has been running serially in this department, is the most complete list of the pattern words in the English language ever compiled. Pattern words are invaluable to cryptographers as the decipherment of many words can be completed once their "pattern" is recognized.

EIGHT LETTERS—INDEX 38

abDucteD, abScondS, abSolveS, afTerwiT, alChemiC, alEhousE, alEuronE, alTruisT, anEcdotE, anTeporT, anTiporT, avEnturE, awEstonE.

beNjamiN, beSaintS, beSpiritS, beStainS, beStickS, biSetouS, blAstimA, boNdsmaN, boTanisT, boYishlY, boY'splaY, buRnt-eaR.

caGelinG, caRouseR, ceNatioN, chEsibIE, clAdoniA, coNy-skiN, coSteanS, crEasotE, crEativE, crEdibIE, cuRsitoR, cuShionS, cyMatiuM, czArevnA.

daCtyliC, daSyureS, deMonisM, deScantS, deSirouS, deSpoilS, deStroyS, diAchymA, diAstemA, diRectoR, diSableS, diSbarkS, diScernS, diScerpS, diShornS, diSobeyS, diSparkS, diSpartS, diSplayS, diSponeS, diSportS, diSrankS, diSrateS, diSrobeS, diSruptS, diStuneS, diSturbS, diSwarmS, diSwontS, doChmiaC.

enChoriC, enStampS, etHnarcH, exScindS.

faGotinG, faShionS, faShiouS, fiNe-spuN, fiEabitE, fiExuosE, foRgiveR, foRsweaR, foUrneaU, fuNctioN.

gaS-workS, gaTe-posT, glAucomA, goDchilD, grAtiolA, gyNeciaN, gyRopteR.

haMiforM, haNger-oN, haStingS, hoMe-farM, hoT-blasT, huManisM, huMorisM, huNtsmaN, huSbandS, huStingS, hyDatoiD, hyDrateD.

icEhousE, inDorseD, inDucteD, inDulgeD, inSpectS, inStyleS, inTeracT.

juDaizeD, juNctioN.

krEasotE.

laDybirD, laNd-turN, laNthorN, laRkspuR, liNesmaN, luNatioN, luNcheoN, luTanisT.

maNequiN, maNgcorN, meChaniC, miSdateS, miSdealS, miShearS, miSleadS, miSrateS, miSreadS, miSruleS, miStakeS, miSteamS, miStuneS, miSturnS, miSyokeS, moSlingS.

NeCrotiC, neScIouS, moMadisM, noTwheaT.

onE-bladE, orDaineD, ouTleapT, ouTrighT, ouTskirT, ovErcamE, ovErladE, ovErnicE, ovErtakE, ovErtimE.

paNgoliN, paNtheoN, paRdoneR, paStureS, peNtagoN, peNwomaN, peTulanT, phEngitE, plAcentA, plEasurE, poStureS, poTulenT, prEambIE, prEcludE, prEhnitE, prEjudgE, prEnticE, prEsbytE, prEstigE, prYinglY, puNcheoN, puRflieR, puRveyoR.

quAdrigA.
reGalinG, reScindS, reSinouS, reSoundS, reSoundS, reSplitS, reSpondS, reStampS, reStockS, reTicenT, roManisM, ruTilanT.
saNctioN, saNd-iroN, saRplieR, scRawleR, shRimpeR, shRinkeR, smOrzatO, soCratiC, spRrawleR, spRingeR, spRinteR, spY-moneY, stErnagE, stRaineR, stRangeR, stRingeR, suGaringG.
thEorizE, toYishlY, trAchomA, trApeziA, trEphinE, tuRnoveR, tyMpanuM, tzArevnA.
ulTraisT, unDampeD, unDeraiD, unDerbiD, unDockeD, unDrapeD, unScrewS, unSpikeS, unStickS, unThrifT, upStairS.
veNatioN, voTaristT.
waGeringG, waTerpoT, wrEckagE.
xaNtheiN.

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abeTTing, abuTTing, apeLLous, aveRRing.
bdeLLium, biwEEkly, blaDDery, blaTTers, bleSSing, bieTTing, bliZZard, bloTTing, bluFFing, bluRRing, braSSock, braTTice, briTTled, briTTles.
cabOOdle, canOOdle, chaFFers, chaFFing, chaNNels, chaPPing, chaRRing, chaSSeur, chaTTers, chaTTing, cheSSman, chiPPers, chiRRups, chiTTers, choPPing, chuFFily, chuMMing, chuMMery, claBBers, claMMing, claNNish, claPPing, claSSify, claSSing, claTTers, claMMing, cliPPers, cliTTers, cloDDing, cloDDish, cloTTing, cloTTers, cluBBing, cluBBish, cluBBist, cluTTers, co-aSSume, coiFFeur, coiFFure, craBBing, craMMing, craNNied, criBBage, criBBled, criBBles, criPPled, criPPles, croPPing, croSSbit, croSSbun, croSSing, croSSlet, croSS-tie, croSSway.
draBBish, draBBles, draFFish, draGGles, dreGGish, dreSSing, driRBles, driBBlet, driLL-bow, driLL-box, driZZles, droLLing, droLLish, droPPing, druBBing, druGGist, druMMing, dueLLing, dueLList, dueTTing, dweLLing.
emiSSary, emiSSory, enzOOtic.
fisH-Hawk, flaMMing, flaPPing, flaTTens, flaTTers, flaTTery, flaTTing, flaTTish, fliPPant, fliTTers, floPPing, fluMMery, fluRRied, fluRRies, fluTTers, fraPPing, freTTing, friBBled, friBBles, friZZled, friZZles, fueLLing.
gauFFers, glaDDens, glaSS-pot, gliMMers, gliSSate, gliSSaun, gliTTers, gloSSary, gluTTony, goaL-Line, goID-Dust, graBBles, graLLoch, graPPled, graPPles, graSS-oil, griLLade, griZZled, griZZles, gruBBled, gruBBles.
inhOOped.
knaPPish, knaPPled, knaPPles.
marOOned.
oveRRuns.
phyLLite, phyLLium, phyLLode, phyLLoid, plaTTing, ploDDing, ploTTing, pluMMing, praTTled, praTTles, preSS-box, preSSing, preSSion, preSSman, preTTify, preTTily, proDDing, pruSSion, psaMMite, puiSSant.
quaFFing, quaRRels, quaRRied, quaRRies, quaSSine, queLLing, quiBBled, quiBBler, quiBBles, quiDDany, quiDDler, quiDDles.
razEEing, reaSSign, reoCCupy, rinG-Goal.
scaBBled, scaFFold, scaLLion, scaMMony, scaPPled, scaRRing, schOOled, schOOner, scoFFing, scrOOped, scuDDing, scuFFled, scuFFler, scuLLery, scuLLing, scuLLion, scuRRied, scuRRile, scuTTled, shaBBily, shaDDock, shaMMing, shaTTery, sheDDing, sheLLing, shoPPing, shoTTing, shuFFled, shuFFler, shuTTing, skuLLcap, slaBBery, slaBBing, slaMMing, slaPPing, slaTTern, sleDDing, sliDDery, sliPPery, sloPPing, sloTTery, sluBBing, sluGGard, sluMMing, sluRRied, sluRRing, sluTTery, smaLL-pox, smeLLing, smuGGled, smuGGler, smuTTily, smuTTing, snaFFled, sniGGled, sniPPety, snoBBery, snuFFbox, snuFFled, snuFFler, snuGGery, snuGGled, spaLLing, spaRRing, speLLing, spiCCato, spiLLway, spiNNery, spoTTing, spuRRing, staBBing, staLLing, staLL-fed, staLLion, steLLary, steMMing, stePPing, stiBBler, stiCCado, stiPPled, stoPPage, stoPPing, stoPPled, stuDDing, stuFFing, stuMMing, swaBBing, swaNNeck, swaNNery, swaPPing, swaTTing, sweLLdom, sweLLing, sweLL-mob, swoPPing, swoTTing.
tabOOing, thaLLium, thrEE-ply, thuGGery, traMMels, traPPous, treKKing, troLLing, truSSing, twaDDler, twaDDles, twiDDles.
unaLLied, unbOOted, uncOOped, unhOOked, unhOOped, unlOOsed, unmEEtly, unmOOred, unrOOted, unrOOted, unsEEmly, uprOOted.
vamOOsed.
whaPPing, wheTTing, whiFFled, whiFFler, whiFFles, whiGGery, whiTTled, whiTTles, whoPPing, whuRRing, wilD-Duck, witHHeld, witHHold, wolF-Fish, wraNNock, wraPPing, wriGGled, wriGGles.


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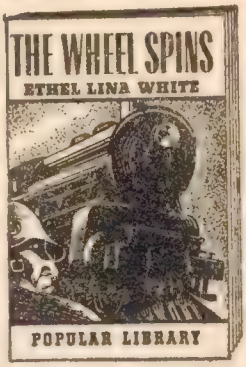

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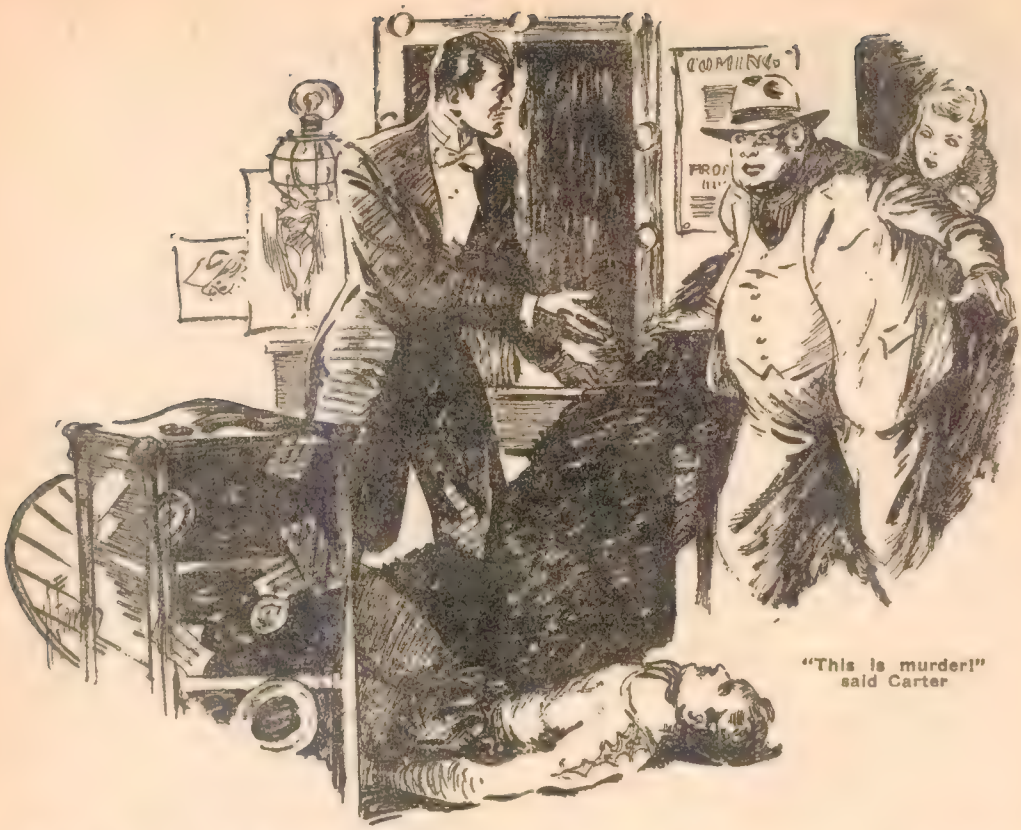



"This is murder!" said Carter

# MURDER MAGIC

## By ROBERT WALLACE

*The Great Gadsden, Famous Magician, Is Suddenly Confronted by a Grim Murder Mystery Far More Baffling Than His Stage Tricks!*

JOHN CARTER known professionally as "The Great Gadsden," halted and stood motionless when he reached the open door of his dressing room. His strong face was expressionless, but his keen eyes narrowed as he gazed at the man who sat looking at him. His visitor reminded Carter of a large and repulsive toad.

"I was under the impression that I locked my dressing room door when I left after the afternoon performance," Carter said in the deep musical voice that was part of the personality that made the Great Gadsden one of the most popular magicians in show business. "May I ask what you are doing here?"

"Waiting for you," said the toad-like individual. "I want five thousand dollars. Froggy Taunton is the name."

"Five thousand dollars—interesting." John Carter stepped into the dressing room and closed the door behind him. He was an impressive figure as he stood there. A tall man dressed in evening clothes with a silk hat on his head. "And what makes you think I will give you that much money, Mr.—er—Taunton?"

"You will—if you want to live," "Froggy" Taunton said sadly. He was, it appeared, a lugubrious sort of man. "I opened your dressing room door with a passkey," he remarked, apparently as an after-thought.

Carter did not speak. He lifted his silk topper from his head and placed it carefully on a corner of the dressing table. The lights that bordered the big mirror were quite bright. The Great Gadsden then drew off his gloves and removed his dark Chesterfield.

Froggy Taunton sat watching in fascination, for Carter managed to make quite an impressive ceremony of taking off his things. The magician's evening clothes were immaculate. His white shirt front gleamed in the

light. He touched his neat little black mustache as he gazed thoughtfully at some small dark spots on the floor of the dressing room.

"You plan to murder me if I don't give you five thousand dollars?" Carter asked casually. "Is that it, Taunton?"

"Don't be silly." Taunton looked like he might cry at any moment. "I want five grand for protecting your life. I happen to know that someone plans to kill you before morning."

"Oh, I see." Carter glanced at his wristwatch. It was just twenty minutes before the evening performance of the variety show started and he was not only the feature act, but also master of ceremonies. "Then you're a private detective, Mr. Taunton?"

"Not exactly," said Froggy Taunton. "I was a bodyguard for a Big Shot up to six months ago, but Marty got careless. He didn't need me any longer."

"How unfortunate." Carter thrust a towel into his collar and seated himself at the dressing table. "You wouldn't care to tell me who plans to kill me before morning?"

THE toad-like man shrugged. "I'd like to tell you—but I can't." Taunton sounded sincere about it. "This evening I was having a bite in a joint near the theater where most of the actors around here eat. I hear a guy and a dame talking in the next booth, so I listen."

"It does while away the time," said Carter, as Taunton paused. "Go on, Froggy."

"The guy says, 'So we have to get rid of the Great Gadsden before morning. If we don't it will spoil our plans.' The dame doesn't say anything. The waiter comes to my booth and starts chinning with me. I look for the guy and the dame a few minutes later but they've gone without me seeing what they look like. So I figure you need protection."

"Jolly decent of you and all that," said the Great Gadsden ironically, a stick of flesh-tint grease paint appearing in his hand. "But I'm afraid I don't feel your protection is worth five thousand, Froggy."

"I wouldn't use that grease paint," said Taunton sadly. "It is probably poisoned."

Carter hesitated, then slowly lowered the stick without touching it to his face. The toad-like individual sounded as though he knew what he was talking about. The Great Gadsden felt an instinctive warning of danger stealing over him. At first he had thought the former bodyguard was merely trying to work some sort of a racket—but now John Carter began to wonder.

"A guy came in here and borrowed your lining pencil before you arrived," said Taunton. "Guess he was the first actor to show up tonight. I told him you asked me to wait for you in your dressing room. Said for me to tell you that Tony Fairmont had borrowed the pencil. He—"

Froggy broke off abruptly as there came a knock on the door of the dressing room. Carter went to the door and opened it. Nancy Gardner, the Great Gadsden's slender blond assistant stood there dressed in street clothes, an expression of great anxiety on her pretty face.

"What's the matter, Nancy?" asked Carter.

"It's Tony Fairmont, the high wire act," said Nancy. "I just passed his dressing room. The door was open and he was lying there on the floor. I—I think he is dead!"

"We'll go see." Carter saw Nancy looking over his shoulder at Froggy Taunton, who had risen to his feet. "Miss Gardner, this is Mr. Taunton who feels he may be of assistance to me."

"It's a pleasure, Miss Gardner," said Taunton as Nancy nodded to him. "Let's take a gander at the stiff."

John Carter led the way to Tony Fairmont's dressing room with Nancy and Taunton close behind him. Fairmont was a dark-haired, wiry looking middle-aged man who was one of the greatest wire walking acts in vaudeville. He was lying on his back on the floor and it only required a brief examination for Carter to be sure that Fairmont was dead.

In the right hand of the corpse was still clutched the lining pencil he had borrowed from the Great Gadsden's dressing room. Carter stood up and glanced at Taunton and the girl. The magician's gaze centered on the collar of Froggy's soft white shirt. There was a black mark on the left side of the collar.

"We'd better send for the police," Carter said. "This is murder!"

"What's going on here?" demanded a gruff voice from the corridor. "All I have is trouble—the stage door keeper gets sick—and is away for nearly an hour. The place might have been robbed. Now what's this?"

A thin gray-haired man shoved past Froggy and the girl and stepped into the dressing room. He frowned as he saw the body lying on the floor. John Carter nodded as he recognized the gray-haired man. It was Fred Buckley, the stage manager of the show.

"Fairmont is dead, Fred," Carter said. "And it looks like murder."

"Murder! How awful!" The stage manager looked anxiously at the magician. "Who did it, John?"

"I don't know." Carter glanced down at the corpse. "Good grief!"

For the first time Carter noticed a little spot of blood that had half dried on the floor near the dead man's left shoulder. The Great Gadsden leaned down and turned the corpse over. There was a thin dagger sticking in Tony Fairmont's back. Evidently it had pierced his heart.

"You wait in your dressing room, Nancy," Carter said. "Taunton, you stay here while I go phone the police. You better come with me, Buckley."

Nancy Gardner left hastily. The Great Gadsden and Buckley stepped out of the dressing room leaving Taunton inside with the body. Froggy Taunton looked quite unhappy. Carter quietly closed the door. He glanced at his wrist watch. There was still eight minutes before the show started.

"I had lunch with Tony Fairmont today," said Buckley as he walked along the corridor beside Carter. "He was worried. Told me that when vaudeville went on the rocks a few years back he was desperate and he worked with a tough gang for awhile. Racketeers of some sort, led by a man named Marty Logan. He left them and they didn't bother him. But within the last few months the police rounded up Logan and some of the rest."

"And the gang was afraid that Tony Fairmont might know enough to talk?" asked Carter. "Is that it, Fred?"

"I guess so." Buckley frowned. "That may be why he was killed."

AT THIS moment they reached a phone booth. Carter called the police and reported what had happened. Buckley waited outside the booth.

"We'll give the show, of course," said the stage manager when Carter joined him. "But we'll have to fill in for Fairmont's act."

John Carter nodded. He felt old and worried. It seemed strange he should feel that way, for he had been looking forward to his birthday tomorrow. After all he had never considered forty so very ancient. He smiled as he thought of Nancy. Maybe that old one about a woman not being able to keep a secret was true.

Buckley left him and Carter went back to Fairmont's dressing room alone. The other performers did not know anything had happened. Froggy Taunton was still with the corpse.

"Who was that guy you called Fred?" Taunton asked.

"Fred Buckley, the stage manager of this theatre," answered Carter. "Why?"

"He's the guy who told the dame about getting rid of you by morning," said Froggy. "I recognized his voice."

"Let's go back to my dressing room and talk this over before the police get here," said Carter thoughtfully. "You've got me wondering about Buckley now, Froggy."

"I told you that you needed protection."

They went back to Carter's dressing room, leaving Fairmont's door closed. It was time for the show to start. Carter put on his Chesterfield and then turned his back on Taunton for a moment as he picked up his silk hat and something out of a drawer at the same time. The object vanished inside the hat as Carter placed the topper on his head.

"You planned it rather well, Froggy," he said. "You are no longer Marty Logan's bodyguard for the simple reason that he is in jail. But you are still loyal to your boss and, like the rest of your gang, got afraid that Tony Fairmont might talk—after having been with the gang."

"Yeah?" Froggy Taunton's expression changed. He looked more sinister than tearful. "Go on."

"You must have been hanging around that restaurant near the theatre hoping to find a way to get a chance to kill Fairmont. Then you heard Buckley and the dame talking, saying they had to get rid of me before morning."

"For a guy who may be bumped off you don't worry much," interrupted Taunton. "I did hear Buckley say that."

"I don't doubt it." The Great Gadsden smiled. "And he was talking to Miss Gardner at the time. You see she told me about it before we came to the theatre tonight. But let's stick to you. You decided that if you could sell me the idea of hiring you as a bodyguard that would give you a chance to be back-stage and kill Fairmont."

"Why, you talk like I did kill that guy," said Taunton.

"You did," said Carter. "Killed him when Tony came into my dressing room tonight to borrow the lining pencil. He picked up the pencil. Then you grabbed him and stabbed him with the dagger. I know he was stabbed here for there are still a few drops of dried blood on the floor. The stage door man was sick—there was no one in the corridor—so you carried the body to Fairmont's dressing room and left it lying on the floor."

"How do you know?" demanded Taunton.

"Because Tony was lying on his back," said Carter. "A man who was stabbed in the back would normally fall face downward. So the body must have been moved. And the blood spots are here."

"Aw, you've got me all wrong," protested Froggy. "Didn't I warn you that stick of flesh tint was poisoned? Haven't I been trying to protect you?"

"That stick wasn't poisoned," said Carter. "I took it out of my pocket, though you didn't see me do it. No one could have poisoned that. I merely wanted to see what you would do."

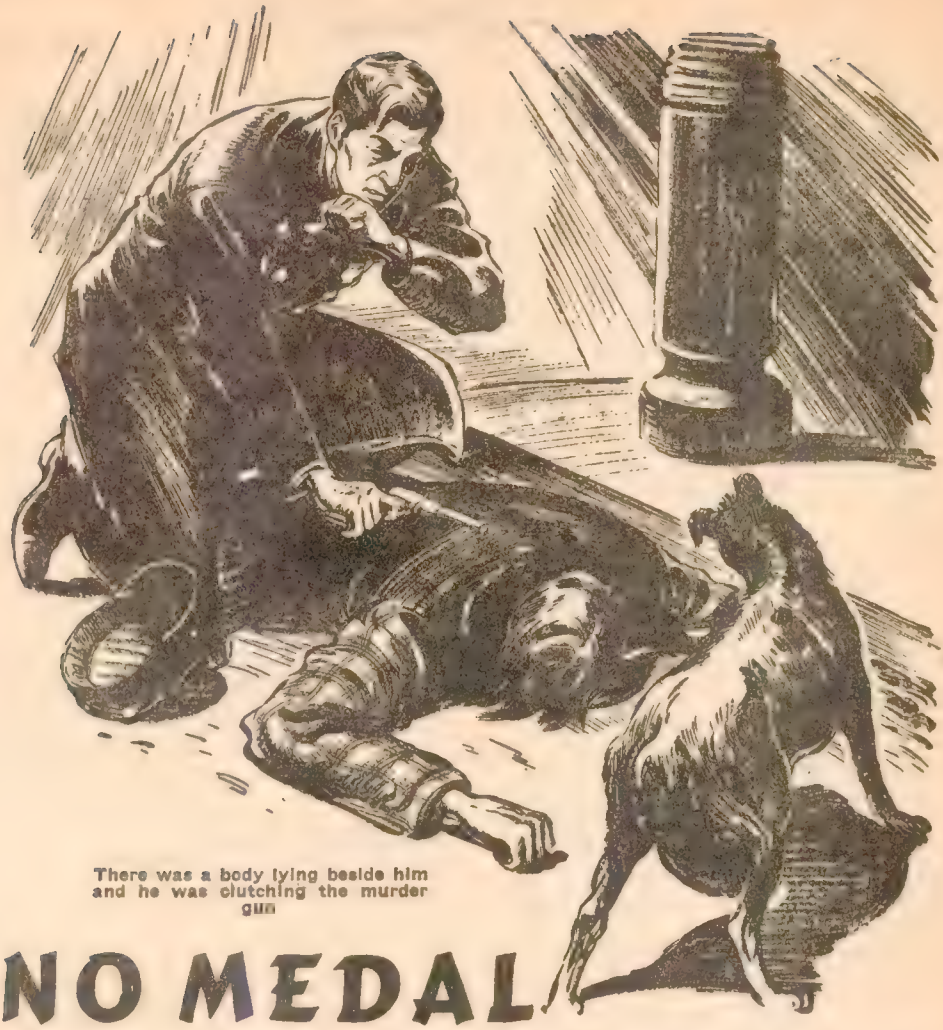
"But what about Buckley and Miss Gardner wanting to get rid of you before morning?" demanded Taunton. "Are you gonna let them bump you off?"

"They're not going to bump me off," said Carter, his eyes narrowing as a gun appeared in Froggy's hand. "Tomorrow is my birthday. They merely wanted to get rid of me long enough to arrange a surprise party for me tonight after the show."

"I'm g e t t i n g out of here," growled Taunton. "You know too much!"

Carter's right foot suddenly shot up and kicked the gun out of Froggy's hand. At

(Concluded on page 81)



There was a body lying beside him and he was clutching the murder gun

# NO MEDAL FOR MURDOCK

**By WILLIAM MORRISON**

*It Was a Neat Murder Frame, but the Killer Didn't Figure on the Nose of the Cop's Dog!*

PATROLMAN HENRY MURDOCK plodded wearily along the street, testing doors to see if they were locked, and wondering if it paid to be honest. Maybe he had been a sucker all these years he had been on the force. Maybe he was being a sucker now, for refusing to do business with George Carron.

Carron was only a small-time gangster, but he knew how to make money, and he was ambitious. There were a half dozen cheap yeggs who took his orders because it paid them. It would have paid Murdock to take his orders, too.

He could have doubled his salary simply by keeping his eyes shut. He could have tripled it by doing things that Carron wanted done.

Instead, he had picked the man up and had him booked for vagrancy. Carron's lawyer had got him out in an hour, and Carron had laughed the incident off, but Murdock knew he hadn't forgotten it. Carron had a good memory for the people he hated.

An old lady was waiting to cross

the street, and Murdock took hold of her elbow and guided her through the traffic. Maybe that was the kind of job he was suited for, he thought bitterly. Taking care of old women. Handling crooks was getting to be a little too much for him.

Well, another eleven months and he'd be pensioned off. They'd have a little ceremony and make speeches, and maybe even give him a medal for his years of faithful service. Maybe then Carron would open the gambling joint he wanted and get away with it. But until then Murdock was upholding the law on this beat.

A dog came running down the street, a couple of kids yelling after it. Murdock's face turned red with anger.

"Leave that dog alone and be on your way home, you little brats!" he roared. "It's time you were in bed. Your dads will lick the pants off you, if I tell 'em what you've been doing."

The kids came to a stop, stuck out their tongues, emitted a Bronx cheer, and then ran away. Patrolman Murdock might be kidding when he threatened to tell their fathers, but they weren't taking any chances.

The dog was a mongrel, but not a bad-looking mutt for all that. He was thin, and looked as if he had been kicked around a bit, but he was young and frisky. And he was grateful, too. Instead of running off, he followed Murdock down the street, his tail wagging at every door the policeman tested.

"That's my speed," spoke Murdock to himself. "Taking care of old ladies and dogs. It's a good thing I've got only eleven months to go."

Then he stopped. A man had stepped out of one of the doorways. He was tall and husky, and looked like an athlete, which he was. He was very well dressed in a dark business suit for which he had paid more than twice what Murdock had ever paid for his own clothes.

Carron didn't look like a small-time gangster. Give him a chance, and he'd go places.

"Hello, Murdock," he said. "I've been waiting for you."

Murdock's eyes brightened. The tiredness fell away from him.

"So it's you again, Carron. Run along now. I've got no time for vagrants."

"Well, well, a cop with a sense of humor," sneered Carron.

"It would sure be funny to see you behind bars again."

"So, you're still feeling that way, Murdock?"

"Still the same way."

CARRON smiled. There was a stronger gleam of hatred than usual in his eyes, but the light being bad, Murdock wasn't sure he had seen it.

"I'm giving you one last chance to play ball, Murdock."

"You want me to keep my eyes shut to what happens around here. I don't play ball with my eyes shut, Carron."

"Any way you want to fix it."

"My idea of playing ball," said Murdock softly, "would be to get a big bat and beat your brains out with it."

Carron muttered deep in his throat and started forward. But Murdock's hand was on his nightstick, and the gangster hesitated. Beside him, Murdock noted that the dog had growled and bared his teeth.

Carron lit a cigarette, trying to appear casual.

"Have it your own way, pal," he sneered. "It's going to be your funeral."

He sauntered slowly down the street, leaving the policeman staring uneasily after him.

Would Carron have the nerve to try getting him bumped off? It didn't seem likely. Cop-killers rarely got away with their crimes, and Carron knew it.

The dog was still with Murdock, and the patrolman, glad of the companionship, reached down and patted the animal's head.

"Come along, Handsome," he said. "We still got some work to do."

He tried the remaining store doors on his beat, and after that made his call to precinct headquarters. He hung up the phone and made his way slowly back down the street up which he had come.

On the way he passed an alley

which led between two long wooden fences that marked the ends of a lot of backyards. Murdock glanced down the alley and got a shock. There was a body lying at one side, where the glare of an arc lamp barely reached it.

He ran down the alley and bent over the body. The body was that of Carl Gribbin, one of Carron's hoods. But there was no sign of bullet hole or knife wound, no blood anywhere.

While he leaned over it, puzzled, the dog began to bark, and Murdock started to straighten up. Then he crumpled to the ground as something smashed down on his skull so hard that in the fraction of a second before everything went black he thought a building had fallen in on him.

The first thing he knew, something was pulling at his shoulder. He didn't want to wake up, but the thing kept pulling. It took him a couple of minutes to realize that it was the dog. Handsome's head was bloody, like his own. Somebody had taken a crack at the animal, too.

There was a body lying beside him, but it wasn't Carl Gribbin's. That puzzled him. It was the body of another one of Carron's hoods, a man he knew as Big-Foot Pierce. This body had a couple of bullet holes through the chest.

He sat up and realized that there was a revolver in his hand. It was his own. He broke it open and saw that two shots had been fired. And there were two bullets in Pierce.

MURDOCK put his hand to his head and winced. That bump on the skull hurt. It must have come from the piece of lead pipe that Pierce was clutching in a dead hand.

It was a queer setup, and Murdock didn't quite get it at first. It seemed as if Pierce had hit him on the head, and he had shot Pierce. But that hadn't really happened. Things just didn't make sense in his muddled head.

Then he heard a whistle blowing, a policeman's whistle, and the shrill sound drove some of the fog out of his brain. He was being framed, he realized.

Gribbin had been stretched out just to lure him into the alley and keep him interested until somebody slugged him. It was that simple. Carron was framing him.

But how could Carron make the frame-up stick? Murdock didn't know, but he was suddenly afraid. Carron was no fool. And if he stayed here waiting, he'd be playing into the gangster's hands.

He put the revolver back in his holster and ran to the fence. He searched feverishly, and finding a loose board, pulled it away from the others, and climbed through.

He started to put the board back in place again, but the dog kept on pawing at it, and he was afraid the animal would attract attention. So he lifted the board again and let the dog through.

Then he let the board fall back in place so that no one would suspect it had been removed. He hoped that the dog wouldn't bark.

He could look out through a tiny knothole in the fence. Two policemen appeared at the end of the alley.

"There it is!" one of them exclaimed.

Then they ran down and stood looking at the body.

He was acquainted with both cops. He had played pinochle with them, and they had been friends of his for years, but he knew that when it came to a question of duty and they thought him guilty of murder, friendship would end. They would treat him as a murderer.

Patrolman Anderson, the taller of the two cops, said, "It's Big-Foot Pierce . How did he get back here?"

"I don't know." The other cop was puzzled. "I heard the shots more than five minutes ago, but I couldn't figure out where they came from. This isn't my beat anyway."

"It's Murdock's. Where do you suppose he is?"

Murdock listened, and the sweat poured down his forehead. Eleven months to go before he got his pension, and now this. No medals for him. He still didn't know how Carron expected to make the frame stick, but he was afraid.

Maybe he had made a mistake by

hiding. If he had stayed there on the ground, recovering from his daze, the picture would have told its own story. It would have seemed that he had stopped Pierce when the latter had acted suspiciously, the hood had pulled a piece of lead pipe and slugged him, and Murdock had then shot in self-defense.

He would have got away with it. It wouldn't have been the true story, but it would have been the story every one believed.

Now, that story wouldn't go down any more. He had made things look bad for himself by leaving the scene.

He started to pull out a handkerchief and froze. His hands had encountered something in his pocket, and without looking at it, he had an idea what the object was. Money. A roll of bills.

In the dim light in back of the fence, he could make out that they were tens. If he knew anything about Carron, those bills were marked, or easily identified by their numbers.

THE money changed the picture completely. Now he knew that it was lucky he hadn't stayed. Those bills would have been pictured as a bribe. The story would have been that he had been taking money from Pierce, had got into a quarrel with the hood, and pulled his gun. Nothing he said would have made people believe differently.

The dog, by awakening him before the gangsters had expected, had saved him from that. All the same, he was still in a jam. He wouldn't be able to prove he hadn't committed the murder. It would be easy enough to prove that the bullets had come from his gun.

He threw the bills into a corner near the fence. At least they wouldn't be found on him. He heard a soft noise, and then he realized that the dog wasn't beside him any more. The animal was moving restlessly around the yard.

A third policeman appeared at the head of the alley. He was holding somebody by the arm, a shrinking, cringing figure. It was Gribbin, the man whose body had lured Murdock into the frame-up trap!

"Who's this guy?" Anderson grunted.

"I've seen him before, but I don't know his name," the new cop said. "I heard shooting, and saw this rat running down the street, so I nabbed him."

The three cops surrounded Gribbin. Anderson spoke.

"So you're the one who killed Pierce, huh?"

The hood licked his lips. He acted a little bit scared, but not, thought Murdock, as much as if he had been really afraid of having a rap pinned on him. "I didn't kill anybody. When the shootin' started, I just turned and beat it."

"You saw who shot Pierce?"

Gribbin nodded.

"Well, spit it out. Who was it?"

"It was Murdock. The cop on this beat."

"You're a liar!" Anderson replied savagely.

He grabbed the hood by the coat collar and pulled back a heavy fist.

Gribbin tried to shrink away. Lane, the cop who had discovered the body along with Anderson, butted in.

"Let's see what he's got to say," he suggested.

"I was walkin' along with Big-Foot, goin' to a pool parlor. When we got to the alley he says to wait a minute. He said he had to see somebody, talk business with him.

"I asked who it was, but he only laughed. So I stayed at the head of the alley, and he walked down a few feet. Somebody was waitin' for him.

"At first I couldn't see who it was. Then the guy came out in the light near that arc lamp, and I noticed the uniform, and saw it was Murdock."

Someplace in the yard the dog, Handsome, barked, and Murdock trembled. He'd be finished altogether if they discovered him listening. Gribbin stopped uneasily.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Just a dog," retorted Anderson. "Go on with your story."

Murdock prayed that the dog would keep quiet, but it didn't. It was whining now, and it seemed a miracle that none of the other cops got curious.

But they were more interested in Gribbin's story.

"Pierce had some money out, and he gave it to Murdock," the hood continued.

"That's a lie!" Anderson roared. "Murdock is an honest cop!"

A FAT lot of good his honesty would do him, thought the listening policeman. Still, he felt better at knowing somebody believed in him.

"I'm just tellin' you what I saw," said Gribbin. " I don't know what the money was for. Anyway, Murdock counted it and I heard him say it wasn't enough. Then he and Big-Foot began to argue.

"The first thing I knew, Murdock was pulling his gun out. Big-Foot hit him over the head with a piece of pipe he was holdin', and Murdock staggered. Then he had the gun out and pulled the trigger. It sounded to me like he shot four or five times, I don't remember which."

Murdock gritted his teeth as he listened. It was clever, that business of Gribbin saying he wasn't sure whether there were four or five shots. Every real witness to a crime got excited and saw things a little bit cockeyed. When a witness told everything exactly as it had happened, without making a single mistake, it looked suspicious.

Gribbin wasn't pulling that boner. The police would examine the body, see that there had been only two bullets pumped into Pierce, and conclude that Gribbin had been so excited he couldn't count straight. They'd give him credit for making an honest mistake.

The cops' faces were white. Murdock knew that they were almost as sick at hearing about what he was supposed to have done as he was himself.

"Gribbin, if you're lying, we'll beat the devil out of you," Anderson muttered.

"We'd better call up headquarters," said Lane.

The other cops nodded. They had been so absorbed in Gribbin's story that they had neglected to inform their superiors of what they had discovered. Murdock knew that it wasn't their job to investigate the crime, but the job of detectives connected with the Homicide Bureau.

Lane walked slowly away. "All right, Gribbin," Anderson said, "what happened then?"

"Murdock was staggerin'. Then he looked down the alley and saw me. I got scared and ran. I was afraid he'd shoot me next."

"You're sure that there were four or five shots?"

"That's what it sounded like to me."

"We heard only two. But we weren't so close to the shooting."

Gribbin didn't say anything more. He had said enough, thought Murdock. Now he wasn't going to add any details to the story he had told. He'd just repeat everything over and over again.

Anderson looked puzzled and unhappy. "I wonder what happened to Murdock anyway. He ought to be around here, even if he didn't shoot Pierce."

"He must have beat it," said the other cop. "Figured that if he ran away, nobody would be able to prove he did the shooting."

"If the bullets turn out to be from his gun, we'll know for sure. And if he claims he's lost his revolver—"

It would look pretty bad, thought Murdock. And it would have looked even worse if they'd found him there unconscious, with the gun in his hand, and the money in his pocket. It was lucky that the dog had aroused him.

THE whole plot was clear now. Carron must have had it in mind before Murdock spoke to him that evening. Killing a cop wasn't healthy—but framing a cop led to the same result, didn't put Carron and his gang in any danger, and gave the crooks even more pleasure. How they'd laugh when they heard the judge sentence Murdock to the chair, or to a long stretch in the pen!

He had been puzzled at first about Big-Foot Pierce, but by now he had figured out the answer to that one. Pierce had been a member of Carron's gang, but had too many ideas of his own. Maybe he had wanted to take over the gang. Carron had got rid of

him and framed Murdock at the same time.

Anderson was questioning Gribbin again, going over the same points Gribbin had already told him about. At times he raised his voice in a shout, and Murdock was glad of that, because it meant that there was less chance of his being heard as he tiptoed away from the fence.

The dog was whining again, making curious sad sounds, and running from Murdock to the other end of the yard as if he'd gone crazy. It was time Murdock found out what was wrong with the animal.

Once he stepped on a board unexpectedly and it creaked. The sweat poured out over him. But nobody in the alley seemed to have heard the sound. Then he was at the other end of the yard, a hundred feet or more away from where Pierce's body was stretched out, staring down at a patch where the dog seemed to be pointing. But it was too dark for him to see what the animal was so interested in.

He pulled out his flashlight uncertainly and decided to take a chance. He flashed a tiny beam on the crumpled grass, shielding the bulb with his fingers so that the light wouldn't spread too much.

Blood on the grass!

He switched off the flashlight and stood there thinking.

There wasn't much blood, but it was enough to tell him what had happened. This was the place where Pierce had really been killed, not out in the alley. That was one of the things that had puzzled him before, the absence of blood near Pierce's body.

There had been another thing, too. The cops who had heard the shooting hadn't been quite sure where the shooting had taken place. They hadn't thought of the alley right away.

Now Murdock knew why. The noise of the shots hadn't come from the alley.

Other things were becoming clearer as he figured out what had happened. Why hadn't he been hit on the head harder? Why had he been hit just hard enough to knock him out for a few minutes and no more?

The answer was that if he had been hit too hard, and had been so completely unconscious when found that it was difficult to revive him, nobody would have believed Gribbin's story. Gribbin had claimed that Pierce had slugged first and Murdock had shot afterward. There had to be something in his story about slugging because there was that bump on Murdock's head.

But if the actual slugging had been too hard, he wouldn't have been able to shoot anybody, and Gribbin would have been shown up as a liar. No, he had to be slugged just hard enough, by an expert. And if he had been found the way Carron had left him, nobody would have thought of looking for other clues. Nobody would have found this patch of blood, for instance.

Again he had to thank the dog.

HE PATTED Handsome's sides, and the animal stopped whining. He switched on his flashlight again, ran the beam over the ground. There were the remains of another stretch of wooden fence nearby, evidently separating two yards. He caught his breath as he looked.

From the rotting old wood there stuck out a rusty nail. On the nail was a strip of cloth. On the end of the nail was a speck of dried blood.

In the alley, detectives had arrived. Murdock could hear the sound of their voices, although he couldn't hear what they said. Then he heard Gribbin's voice again. The hood was probably repeating his story for them once more.

Murdock moved back through the yard again. And then another voice cut in.

"Hey, what's going on around here?" it demanded.

Carron himself!

Murdock's eyes were full of cold fury now. To look at his face you wouldn't have thought that he was an old and tired cop, eleven months away from retirement. There was no longer anything tired about him.

"What do you want here, Carron?" It was Anderson who asked the question.

"I just came around to look. I heard

a lot of noise, and found that Gribbin was in trouble."

"He'll be in plenty of trouble if his story doesn't hold up."

"Don't tell me he shot Pierce. Why, he and Pierce were pals."

"You don't say."

"Sure. Everybody liked Pierce."

Murdock smiled grimly in the darkness. He knew why Carron was here. Both Pierce and Gribbin were known to be members of his gang, and he would have been found and questioned anyway. But there was something more than that.

He wanted to see Murdock's face. That was it. He wanted to see the cop sweat while the framed evidence penned him in so that he couldn't escape. He wanted to gloat at seeing the sick faces of the other cops who had to arrest Murdock.

It must be a disappointment to him not to find Murdock there.

Murdock made up his mind. He wasn't a man to disappoint anybody. Let Carron get what satisfaction he could out of the sight of him.

He pushed the loose board away from the fence.

Before he could climb to the other side, the dog had leaped through the opening, barking furiously. Everybody looked up as the animal sped for the group surrounding Pierce's dead body.

Then Carron suddenly yelled and cursed. The animal had leaped straight for him and sunk his teeth into the gangster's legs.

He kicked at Handsome, and the dog drew away, still barking, the hate showing clearly in his canine eyes.

"What's this, Carron?" one of the detectives asked suspiciously. "What have you done to this dog?"

"Me? Nothing! I never saw him before!"

"I don't believe you. He knows you too well."

"You think so?" snarled Carron. "Ask him, before I shoot the lousy mutt."

MURDOCK was climbing through the hole in the fence now. The dog ran to him. "Murdock!" Anderson exclaimed. "Where the devil have you been?"

[Turn page]

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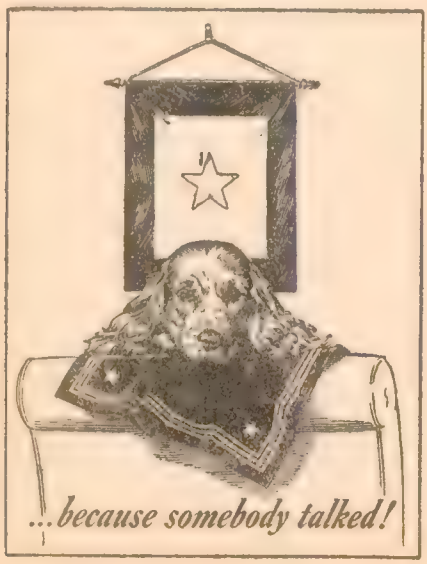


"Out on a case."

"A case?"

"Murder case. I've been investigating."

Carron laughed. "The perfect cop. You'll have no trouble now in finding out who shot Pierce."

Gribbin pointed. "It's him! He's the one that done it!"

"Let's see your revolver, Murdock," one of the detectives said huskily.

Without a word, Murdock handed it over.

"Two bullets missing. Two bullets in Pierce. We'll hold on to this and see if the bullets check."

"I think they will," said Murdock. "I think they came from my gun. I'd practically swear to it."

"Sure, I saw you kill him," Gribbin said.

Carron laughed again.

"Murdock, I never thought a cop like you would pull a trick like this," Anderson said gloomily.

"Hold on, Anderson. Gribbin says I killed Pierce. I want to get straight how I did it."

"What's the matter," sneered Carron. "Your memory bad?"

"It could be worse. How about it, Gribbin? You're sure you saw me talking to Pierce in this alley?"

"Positive."

"And you saw me shoot him?"

Gribbin nodded. "I was watching."

"You're not going to change your story."

"It's true," insisted Gribbin. "I'll stick to it."

"You're going to be stuck with it," said Murdock grimly. He turned to the detectives. "Now, you boys take a look at this body. Notice anything funny?"

"Some people," said Carron, "think any corpse is funny."

"There's something extra funny about this one. It didn't bleed. According to what Gribbin said, Pierce was full of life one minute, swinging a piece of lead pipe when I pumped bullets into him. The blood should have spurted out. Where is it?"

Anderson's eyes gleamed. "You're right. There's practically no blood."

"Remember that. Here's something else. Take a look at Pierce's skull. He's been hit. But Gribbin repeated his story time and again, and he never

said I hit Pierce."

"He could have got the bump," said Gribbin uncertainly, "when he fell."

"Not on that part of his skull. It wasn't even touching the ground. If his skull had got smashed when he fell, it would have been smashed in back. This bump is on top."

There was fear suddenly in Gribbin's eyes.

"Hold on to him, boys," Murdock said. "There's more to come."

He leaned over and scratched Handsome's ears.

"This mutt," he said, "is a better detective than all of us put together. He gave me the answer to why there's so little blood around Pierce.

"Pierce wasn't shot here in the alley at all. He was shot in that back yard. At the place where he was shot, you *will* find blood on the grass. But not much. Because he was unconscious when he was shot, almost dead already.

"The man who shot Pierce used my revolver. That was part of the plan. But Pierce wasn't going to hang around waiting until somebody got my revolver to shoot him with. That's why he was knocked unconscious and kept in that yard until the time arrived to kill him."

He looked at Gribbin, and laughed. "How about repeating that story about seeing me do the killing?"

GRIBBIN'S face was chalk-white. He struggled, but the two detectives who held him had a good grip.

"You killed him," accused Murdock. "You arranged this frameup to get me. But you're the one who's going to fry on the chair! You're the one——"

"No, it wasn't me, it was Carron! I didn't do it, I swear! Carron arranged everything. He shot Pierce himself. He slugged you first——"

Carron had turned. You wouldn't have thought Murdock was an old tired man then, the way he leaped at the gangster, and smashed a heavy fist to his jaw.

Carron winced, and tried to duck the next punch, but Murdock was too fast for him. Another fist connected, and Carron's head jerked back as he slumped to the ground.

"I didn't do it, you can't burn me!"

(Concluded on page 80)

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# G-MEN AT WAR

## TRUE STORIES OF FEDERAL AGENTS IN ACTION

AS THE war moves along toward its decisive stages, the American people are becoming more familiar with the way in which peacetime government law-enforcement agencies have geared themselves for their part in this great struggle we are now waging. The United States Secret Service, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and other Government bodies are doing an all-out job to speed United Nations Victory! They have been doing this job, efficiently and successfully, since long before Pearl Harbor.

Many of their deeds will forever remain unsung, for reasons of National Security—for secrecy is essential to their success. But there are some cases that deserve attention, and we are bringing these to you at this time.

### Japanese Trickery

One of the constant sources of irritation to many American citizens in and around the city of New York, shortly after Pearl Harbor, was the continued presence of the Japanese Building, erected for the New York World's Fair of 1939 and 1940. These people will be delighted to know that this building played an important rôle in rounding up an important Japanese spy ring, and that its demolition was delayed for this reason.

The scene opens shortly before Pearl Harbor in an office in New York city, with gold lettering on the doors announcing that it is the "JAPANESE NAVAL INSPECTOR'S OFFICE." Down the corridor there is another neatly lettered job proclaiming the "JAPANESE ORDNANCE INSPECTOR'S OFFICE." In this respect, the Japanese were frank at least.

Behind the desk in the Naval Inspector's Office, sat an official whose job it was to assemble sample materials secured from various sources to be sent to Japan for examination and duplication.

One morning a beaming Nipponese came into the office, and turned over his reports to the Naval Inspector.

"How is this going?" he asked.

"It goes well," replied the Inspector. "Each month we are sending one half million dollars worth of materials to Japan."

"Is not this new embargo on shipment of goods to Japan going to interfere with this traffic?" asked the visitor.

"Indeed," replied the Naval Inspector. "But we are working on that."

The F.B.I. was working on it, too. The Japanese were one step ahead of the G-men for the time being, since they had to open a transport route before the Federal operatives could close in on them.

In a field office of the F.B.I. a few days after the conference in the Japanese Naval Attache's office in New York, two G-men were discussing the case.

"There's a truckman who has been doing quite a bit of business transporting cases of goods to the official Japanese Pavilion at Treasure Island World's Fair in San Francisco, and a corresponding company is probably taking care of the same business for the New York World's Fair," pointed out one special agent. "Maybe we can find some link with contraband shipments to Japan."

"Right," agreed his companion. "We'll check into that."

The machinery of the F.B.I. immediately went into action, and cases of goods placed aboard railroad trains in New York by the Japanese transfer agent were checked through to San Francisco. There Pacific Coast agents picked up the trail and followed it to a pier where the Japanese steamship Asama Maru was loading for Japan.

While the suspected case was under observation a young Jap approached the ship. One of the F.B.I. agents halted him.

"What's your name, buddy?" he asked. "And where's your pass?"

"Name is Gizo Uyena," replied the Jap.

He showed his pass, which had been issued by the transfer company. The shipment to Japan in which this fellow was interested proved on examination to contain a consignment of contraband machine tools.

Through this link back to the transfer company, it was also discovered that the transfer agent was bringing all sorts of Japanese propaganda printed matter, magazines and books, into the United States by the simple process of tearing off the original shipping labels, and pasting on labels addressed to Japanese or other diplomatic officials entitled to the freedom of the port.

With this information as a guide, the F.B.I. was able to clean up many other similar cases both before and after Pearl Harbor.

### A Summer Vacation

Few clear-thinking Americans believed that with the declaration of War by Germany against the United States in December, 1941, that the many Bundlike organizations mas-

querading as social clubs, athletic clubs, and other fraternal associations would dissolve. Most of them simply went "underground."

Others dissolved with a great deal of publicity and immediately reopened with new names and meeting places. The F.B.I. was forced to keep track of all of these changes.

One bright spring morning a little over two years ago an F.B.I. agent who was interested in following the activities of the Bund and their camps in Northern New Jersey received an interesting communication. As far as the Bundist friends knew, our G-man was a capable and trusted fellow-traveler. The interests of Hitler Germany were uppermost in his heart. Of course the F.B.I. man had adopted this rôle completely as a pose.

The new letter announced:

> We are pleased to advice you that Camp Bergwald will open for the summer to help our members and their friends in their physical training work and in gaining the full benefits of outdoor life.

Those were not the exact words, but that was the gist of the letter. Our agent immediately informed Director J. Edgar Hoover, and they decided to have the agent spend his summer vacation at Camp Bergwald in the beautiful Pompton Lakes country of upper New Jersey.

The summer vacation was not wasted. The F.B.I. agent hadn't been there long before he discovered that it was a part of the "full benefits of outdoor life" to go through military drills. A good deal of the evening's entertainment consisted of short-wave radio reports from the "Super-men" in Berlin and neighboring communities.

But the activities of the group extended well beyond the limits of Camp Bergwald. The G-man met a number of interesting characters, such as Otto Greiner, National Deputy Leader in charge of the Middle West District of the new German-American Vocational

[*Turn page*]

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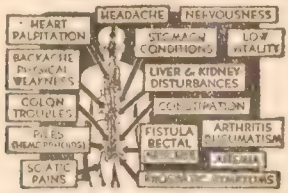


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League. Then there was Herman Gastreich, active in the Kansas City Branch; Emil Schneider of San Francisco, who was barred from residence in the Western Defense Command area and subsequently moved to Denver. Dozens of others came under the watchful eye of the F.B.I. agent.

A quick trip to Washington developed an interesting conversation with Director J. Edgar Hoover. "What've they got up there?" the director wanted to know.

"They call it the Deutsch-Amerikanische Berufagemeinschaft," replied the agent. "But according to the evidence I've seen at the camp there, it's directly affiliated with the German Labor Front."

Director Hoover whistled. Then he asked: "Do we have enough evidence on them?"

"Yes, sir," replied the agent.

Apparently Attorney General Francis Biddle agreed with the agent, for in the fall of 1943, the Federal Grand Jury in Newark, New Jersey, returned an indictment against the German American Vocational League, Inc., of New York, with headquarters in that city, and branches in 11 other principal cities. It also brought charges against a subsidiary corporation and twenty-seven officers and members, charging them with illegally conspiring to act as agents of the German Reich.

Another important cell of Axis Fifth Column activity had been sealed.

## Chasing Draft Dodgers

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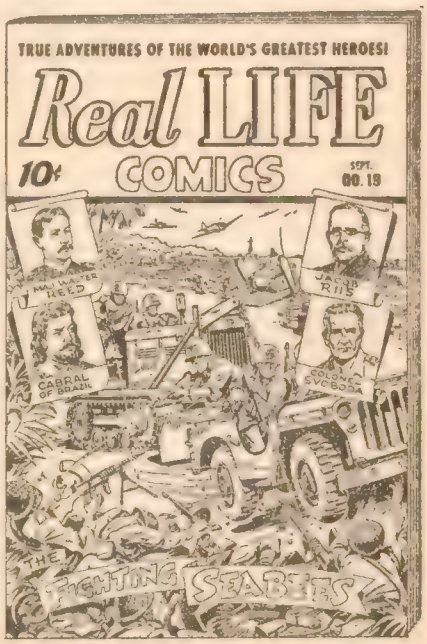


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where the Selective Service Act has not had an important bearing on our American way of life. Generally speaking, all patriotic Americans are loyal and courageous and are more than willing to accept the responsibilities of citizenship.

This has brought millions of men into the Armed Forces of the United States. But there are groups and individuals who attempt to evade their responsibility under the Selective Service laws. These peoples, if successful, would cause considerable ill-feeling. In fact in many small towns, it is not unusual to hear conversations similar to the following in local stores:

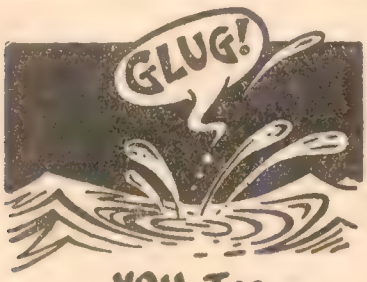
"Isn't it too bad! Joe Brink was drafted today. He has a sickly wife and three small children. Joe didn't mind going. But he does want to know why they didn't take Bill Forbes, who's single and appears to have no family responsibilities."

That's one of the less glamorous problems that the F.B.I. has been called upon to investigate in a country at war. Sometimes they discover that Bill Forbes has been placed in 4-F, because of some physical disability that will not permit him to be used even for limited service, nor can be cured by the Army's Rehabilitation program.

On some occasions, however, there is need for prosecution, and the G-men crack down in no uncertain terms. Up until the last quarter of 1943, they had arrested and convicted 6,036 persons for Selective Service violations. Sentences totalling 14,102 years were imposed, and fines were collected amounting to $572,820.

This doesn't give any real idea of the number of cases investigated, however. A check with the local offices of the F.B.I. brings the information that more than 250,000 draft cases have been investigated. Of this number, the registrants have either been made available to the Armed Services, or were found to have complied with the Act.

So when you come right down to it, fellow Americans, 6,036 draft dodgers out of a citizen Army of 12,000,000 isn't a bad percentage. The F.B.I. is doing another good job there.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## NO MEDAL FOR MURDOCK

(Concluded from page 75)

Gribbin was babbling. "It was Carron's idea from the beginning!"

Murdock nodded. "Go ahead, and spill it."

Gribbin spilled everything, and they took him away. Anderson looked at Murdock. "I knew all the time it wasn't you, Murdock," he said.

"Nice work, Murdock," one of the detectives said. "But you made a mistake in figuring it was Gribbin, and not Carron, who did the shooting."

"A mistake?" Murdock grinned. "I knew it was Carron. But I wanted to scare Gribbin enough to make him confess. Come on into the back yard and I'll show you the evidence.

"First, there's the roll of money they planted on me. And right near that pool of blood on the grass there's a nail with a tiny piece of Carron's suit stuck onto it. There's a speck of Carron's blood on the end of the nail.

"The nail tore his suit when he shot Pierce. It also scratched him. Take a look at his leg, and notice the scratch with iodine on it. I saw the brown stain when the dog tore at his pants leg. That was all the evidence I needed.

"But I figured that it never hurts to have a gangster's pal turn stool. So I scared Gribbin by accusing him of the murder."

"Why did the dog leap at Carron that way?" Anderson asked.

"Because he hit the dog around the time he knocked me out. Notice the blood on the animal's head. Handsome came into the alley with me and saw the whole thing. He couldn't say anything, but he could be a big nuisance to Carron while he was arranging the frame-up. Carron probably tried to kill him, but the dog was too fast for him. I owe a lot to that animal."

And that was putting it mildly, thought Murdock. Life, instead of death in the chair, honor instead of disgrace, a pension eleven months from now, maybe even that medal.

He shook his head slowly as the dog, its tail wagging, followed him home. He deserved everything else, but certainly no medal. That, he decided, in case he got it, was going to be pinned on Handsome.

## MURDER MAGIC

(Concluded from page 66)

the same time the magician barely seemed to touch his high silk hat, but there was an automatic in his hand covering the toad-like man.

"I think the police have arrived," said Carter as he heard voices out in the corridor. "So I'll turn you over to them."

Nancy opened the door of the dressing room clad in her costume for the show and there were police behind her. A few crisp words of explanation from John Carter and the police grabbed Froggy Taunton.

"You'll find that black mark on the left side of his collar comes from the lining pencil in Fairmont's hand," said Carter as they took the prisoner away.

"On stage, John," ordered Nancy. "The show has started and it is time for your entrance."

"All right." Carter put down the gun and settled his hat on his head. "Our friend Taunton tried murder magic—but he was strictly an amateur."

"You're a swell boss," said Nancy as she hurried him toward the stage. "And I adore you—but at times I'm afraid you are strictly ham!"

---

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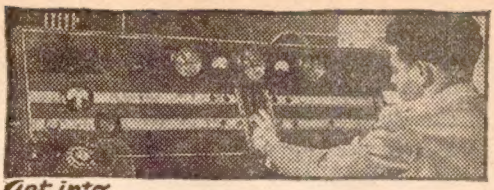

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